THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

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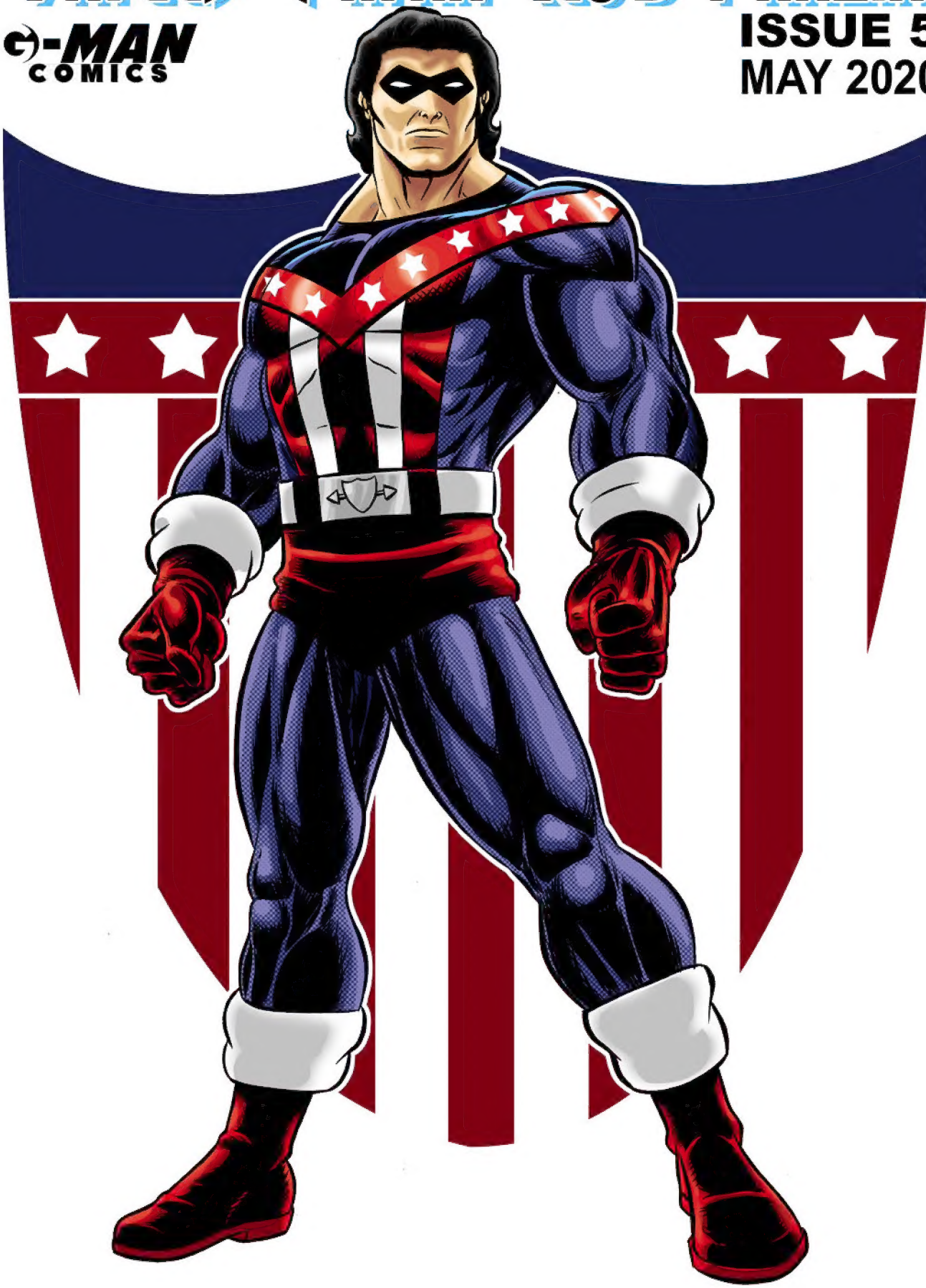

THE SHIELD G-MAN CLUB FANZINE

Volume 1, Number 5 May 2020

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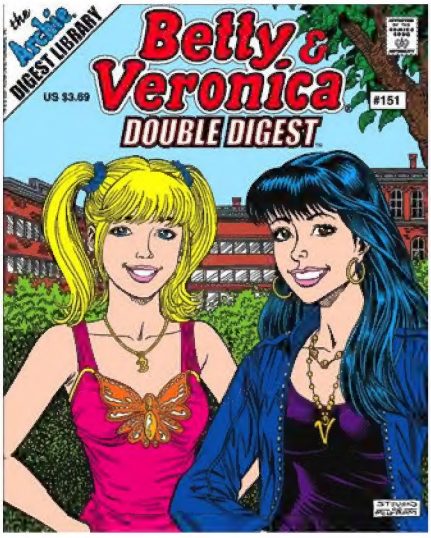


was doing it concurrently with some Sonic the Hedgehog work at the time.

SGMC: How long did you work on the handbook?

Steve: For the better part of a year.

SGMC: What type of research did you do for the project?

Steve: I remember going to comic stores and buying whatever I could find of the Red Circle line from the '80s, and Mike P. sent me the three trade paperbacks they had put out (Shield, Fly, and Mighty Crusaders). But, for a lot of those obscure villains, I had to scour the Internet to find what I could. Mike sent me scans of a lot of the guys, but some I had to look for. Most of the really obscure ones were from the Mighty Comics line, which I didn't have any comics of. I sure could have used that TwoMorrows Mighty Crusaders book YOU worked on, but that was still several years away from being a reality itself.

SGMC: How far along did you go on the project before it was canceled?

Steve: Oh, I completely finished my part, only to hear the book was being shelved.

SGMC: Were you given any reason why they stopped the project?

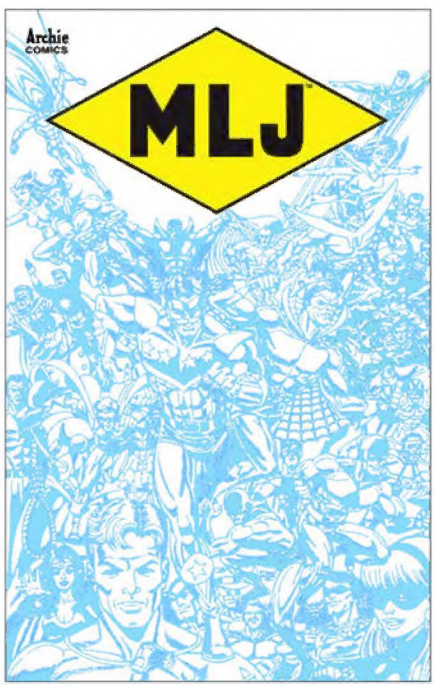
Steve: The entire Archie superhero lineup had just been licensed to DC Comics, thus preventing Archie from producing The Who's Who book. I remember asking Mike after the rights had been reverted back to Archie if they planned on printing it, but was told they were going in a different direction with the line. This was when they started that "New Crusaders" thing.

SGMC: How did you feel when Archie used your Who's Who pictures for the variant cover of *Superteens Versus the Mighty Crusaders*?

Steve: I thought it was really cool. It just would have been nice to get a few comp copies. Ha!!

SGMC: Would you like to return to the Mighty Crusaders at some point in the future?

Steve: You betcha! I really love these characters. Outside of the 1970's era Avengers, they're my favorite superhero team!



The Butler Brigade vs. the Superteens

interview by Rik Offenberger

Editor's Note: *There have been enough interesting pitches made to Archie over the years that I would like to make coverage of them a regular feature of the G-Man Club Fanzine. As a result, I imposed upon Steve Butler and our august Editor-in-Chief to tell us about Steve's Superteens pitch, and voila! Watch future issues for additional installments in the series.*

Shield G Man Club: Steve, I heard you also had a pitch for the Superteens. What can you tell us about that?

Steve Butler: About nine or ten years ago, I drew up the Archie superhero stuff seen below as a pitch to Archie Comics. I had been working for the company for about eight years by then, mostly drawing the *Sonic the Hedgehog* title, but also on the Betty and Veronica "new look" books. When doing these, I decided to pitch it in two different styles, one that exemplified the Dan Decarlo/Stan Goldberg classic Archie look, and another that was more in line with the "new look" that I had recently drawn the characters in at the time.

Steve: I got very positive feedback from the guys in editorial, but nothing ever came from it. Oh well, that's how it goes. Sometimes, it's just about timing. Anyway, I recently found these pieces and thought I'd share them. Colors are by my good friend and co-worker Craig Schutt.

ARCHIE ANDREWS IS...
PUREHEART
THE POWERFUL!
TITANIC TEENAGE TURMOIL!
CATCHING CROOKS AND SAVING BEAUTIFUL GIRLS--ARCHIE M'MAN, YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY!
OH WOW, OH, WOW! PUREHEART, YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO SWEEP A GIRL OFF HER FEET! SOMETHING ODDLY FAMILIAR ABOUT HIM, THOUGH.
MMMM... TASTES LIKE CHICKEN!
JUGHEAD JONES IS CAPTAIN HERO
NOW THAT I'M A SUPERHEROINE, ARCHIE'S SURE TO PAY MORE ATTENTION TO ME.
BETTY COOPER IS SUPERTEEN
THINK YOU'RE ALL "THAT, EH, POOR-HEART? WELL, I KNOW YOUR SECRET, AND YOUR TIME IS ALMOST UP!!
REGGIE MANTLE IS BULLHEART

SGMC: Who did you pitch the Superteen comic to?

Steve: Mike Pellerito. He liked it! But nothing ever came out of it. I chalked it up to bad timing.

SGMC: Sonic was their number one title at the time and Mike was the junior editor?

Steve: I think so, yes. I think the book peaked under Justin Gabrie's watch and continued on during Mike's run as editor. This was pre-Ian Flynn as the writer.

SGMC: Did he ask for the pitch, or was this all your idea?

Steve: Oh, it was all my idea. I think I pitched it after I did that *New Look* storyline.

SGMC: What did Mike say about the pitch at the time?

Steve: Mike just told me he loved the look of the thing and said he had copies of the art on display at his desk for others to see, but never followed up with it. Plus, I was busy drawing Sonic, and maybe they saw more value in me doing what was their flagship book at the time than taking a chance on something else that might or might not sell.

I didn't even have a concise storyline, just some images I drew and thought might be a good idea to expand upon.

SGMC: Your pitch was for Superteens set in the Archie Universe?

Steve: Sure, kinda like if the "new look" guys I drew actually got superpowers.

This was all way before the Afterlife With Archie stuff came out

SGMC: Did you envision a crossover with the MLJ Superheroes down the line, or was this the Superteens only?

Steve: Oh, a crossover with the Crusaders would definitely have been something I would have loved to do. I saw where they did exactly that fairly recently in a mini-series.

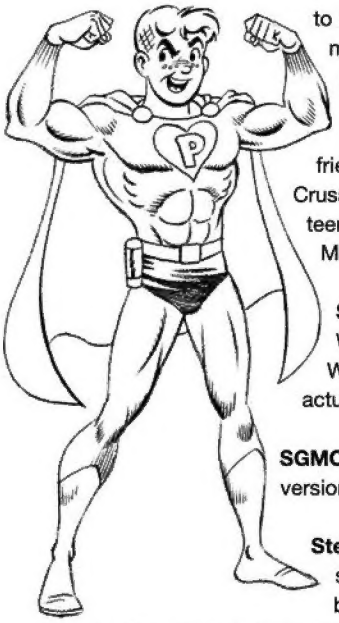
SGMC: How do you reconcile the Superteens with Superpowers and regular Archie & Friends in the same universe?

Steve: Well, my idea was to have the stories set in the "new look" universe, which I see as a separate thing from the regular classic Archie Universe.

SGMC: How would you have handled Superteens meet the Mighty Crusaders?

Steve: Oh, I dunno, probably bring them together in a joint effort to defeat the Brain Emperor or somebody who is menacing Riverdale.

Steve: Or maybe the Brain Emperor manipulated the Superteens to do his evil bidding using mind control or something, and the Crusaders come to blows with them that way, and have to do something



to shake the mind control. There are many ways you could do it and make it fun and exciting

SGMC: Can you see a Superfriends relationship with the Mighty Crusaders as the JLA and the Superteens taking the place of Wendy and Marvin?

Steve: Maybe more like the Wonder Twins, because unlike Wendy and Marvin, the Superteens actually have superpowers!

SGMC: You would use the Golden Age version of the heroes?

Steve: For me, the Golden Age versions of the Crusaders are the best versions. They're my favorites, though I also like the Jaguar, Fly, and Lancelot Strong, who were more Silver Age characters.

Steve: However, the current iteration of the Crusaders features a lot of teenagers who are the same ages as the Superteens, so they'd fit right in—more like Wolfman and Pérez's New Teen Titans back in the day.

SGMC: The plan was for a Superteens monthly?

Steve: Not really a monthly. I was just wanting to pitch a mini-series. They hadn't done anything on a regular monthly basis with them since the Red Circle days of the 80s. I kinda knew pitching a monthly would not be a viable thing, but it never even got to that point—just me showing them the artwork as a feeler that never went any farther than that.

Steve: You gotta understand that this is the same company who approached me to do that MLJ Who's Who thing (that we talked about earlier), I think because they knew how much I loved those characters, and it took me the better part of a year to complete. To then have the bottom drop out of the project right at the time of final completion, because of the DC acquisition of the characters at that time...

SGMC: Could you have added the miniseries to your Sonic workload at the time?

Steve: Probably. I'm always juggling assignments—it would have just meant rearranging some things for a time. But it wasn't meant to be. All about the timing, I believe.

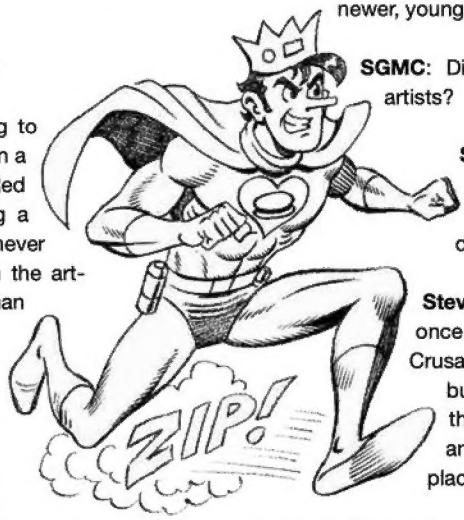
SGMC: Were you planning on writing and drawing the miniseries?

Steve: I would have liked to have given the writing a shot. It's something I haven't done a lot of in the industry.

SGMC: Did you envision it as a story about teen superheroes who just happen to be the kids from Riverdale so it focused on superheroes, or was it the Kids from Riverdale who just happen to have superpowers so it focused on Archie & Friends?

Steve: I'd probably make it like some kind of "event" happening and those particular kids just happened to be in the wrong place at the right time, like a meteor crashing and affecting them all, or maybe an alien abduction type thing, but something that affects them all at the same time, like how the FF got their powers together. Now you've got me thinking how cool of a story that would make. Ha!!!

Steve: When they actually came back around to doing something with the Superteens, and even the Crusaders, they were tapping their newer, younger talent for it.

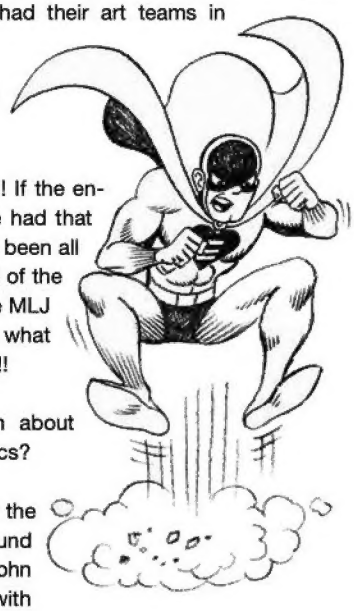


SGMC: Did they tell you they wanted newer younger artists?

Steve: They didn't tell me they wanted new artists. I just saw the books when they came out and that they were going in a new and different direction.

Steve: I do remember mentioning to Paul Kaminski once about the possibility of doing some of that New Crusaders stuff that directly pre-dated the Dark Circle, but he kind of changed the subject and that was that I think he probably knew they had other plans and already had their art teams in place by then.

SGMC: What did you think of the Fox series?



Steve: I **LOVED** the Fox series!! If the entire Dark Circle line would have had that same kind of vibe, I would have been all over it! As it stands, that's some of the best material to come out of the MLJ line, showing a true homage to what came before. Absolutely loved it!!

SGMC: Did you talk to them about working on the Dark Circle comics?

Steve: I don't think so, not for the Dark Circle stuff. That was around the time I was doing the John Aman Amazing Man series with

Barry Gregory, and that was taking the bulk of my time.

SGMC: Would you still be open to doing the story today?

Steve: I'd have to think really hard about it, on account of I'm in the middle of doing my own projects these days with my daughter, and they're taking up the bulk of my time, but if the opportunity presented itself, well, I do love these characters!!

SGMC: You and your daughter have the first Kickstarter *Fianna McCool and the Hound of Ulster*. What's next?

Steve: Well, Fianna is a four-issue thing. We'll be doing a Kickstarter for all of them.

SGMC: After that?

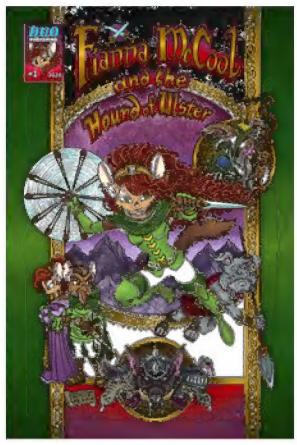
Steve: After that, I have a horror-hero themed idea.

SGMC: Why horror?

Steve: Because I loved the horror-themed heroes when I was a kid. Werewolf by Night, Swamp Thing, Ghost Rider.

SGMC: What's the horror idea?

Steve: Doc Lazarus "deceased" masked wrestler back from the grave to fight Zombies, Vampires, and Werewolves. A tribute to the horror hero comics I loved as a kid, as well as those classic El Santo movies I used to love to watch.



SGMC: Where does that leave Gallant Comics and Charlton Arrow?

Steve: I still do covers and character designs for Gallant Comics, but have moved over to doing my own projects with my daughter. Together, we've started "DUO Publishing", with *Fianna McCool and the Hound of Ulster* being our featured project. As for Charlton Arrow, we're in talks about future projects there as well.

SGMC: Is the Mr. Mixit series over?

Steve: I hope not! But Mr. Mixit is a joint production between myself, Mort Todd, and Roger McKenzie. I believe we'll be seeing more of him—the timing just has to be right.

SGMC: And of course there still are commissions and covers…

Steve: I do variant homage covers for Brian Pulido on a regular basis.

Steve: I have a YouTube channel "Steven Butler Studios". I've been making regular drawing videos for it. — https://bit.ly/sbs-yt

Peaceful Number Three

by Michael Shorkey

For decades, many Comic Book Fans have constantly debating "Who is Number One?" when it comes to being the Top Dog of the Comic Book Publishing Business, DC Comics or MARVEL Comics. But... for a long time, there has been a publisher who has held Third Place firmly in hand. Some may think Dark Horse or Image, but those companies wish that they had the legacy and longevity that this company has had... Archie.

When you first think "Archie", you think "That company that makes all those Archie Andrews books? The same company that used to publish those Sonic the Hedgehog comics?" Yes, that very same one. But let's look at its history. Started in 1939, one year after the debut of Action Comics No. 1, the company "MLJ" was founded by Maurice Coyne (M), Louis Silberkleit (L) and John L. Goldwater (J) and when they entered, they were, like most companies around that time, making costumed heroes that sold like hotcakes—characters like the first 'patriotic hero', the Shield, who pre-dated Captain America by a year. In fact, the reason why Captain America's shield changed from the traditional Medieval shaped one to the 'circular Frisbee®' was due to the fact that Marvel was worried that MLJ would sue them over the similarities it had to the Shield's costume design. They also made other heroes like the Black Hood, who was so popular he got his own radio show, similar to characters like the Shadow, the Green Hornet and others.

Like many comic book publishers during World War II, their hero characters were the blood of the business. But after the war, due to the decline in popularity of 'masked crusaders', they needed a new business model, something to keep them afloat. They found it in the character Archie Andrews, a young 1940s teen that many young readers at the time could identify with. He proved so popular that MLJ left the super hero business and even changed the company's name to Archie Comics. While the Justice Society and the Marvels battled for sales the perky teens of Riverdale worried about school and socializing in post-war American culture.

Unlike Archie, **many** companies either merged or folded, leading many heroes to never again take up space on a newspaper stand or book shelf —that is of course except for Marvel and DC, who still pushed out top quality hero stories. Archie Comics did try to get back into the Super Hero business multiple times such as in the 1960s, the 1980s, the 1990s (with DC's help) and even as recently as the 2000s and 2010s, but with only modest success.

To this day, Archie Comics still makes a lot of money with its merchandising and licensing. Some might not know this but that popular television series on The CW—'Riverdale'—is based on Archie and his friends. Their comics sell well due to their way of doing business, putting them in check-out lanes of grocery stores and gas stations, right next to the crossword puzzles, coloring books and Sudoku.

They know their audience and market, aim for 'all ages', and give an appropriate amount of nostalgia/fan-service, and they still sell comics, whether it be Archie, Sabrina The Teenage Witch, Josie and the Pussycats or licensed comics. (Archie is well known in the Sonic the Hedgehog community for their various contributions.)

DC and Marvel are owned by large corporations (Warner Brothers and Disney), but in recent years, their sales have dwindled, leaving many to believe that their comics divisions will be closed in the near future, with the Marvel and DC heroes being licensed out to smaller publishers. But Archie is a privately owned company, with their main focus being comics that are easy to pick up and read.

Archie may have been third place for the past century, but now they may out-live their competition, and perhaps even license Marvel and DC heroes themselves in the future—maybe even see the Crusaders meet the Avengers and/or Justice League. The MLJ heroes are currently retired, but someday we may see them again, and if Archie markets the heroes like they do with Archie Andrews, perhaps they can finally achieve success with a fresh market. Only time will tell.

The Heroes of Their Own Story

by David Noble

Christopher Vogler, author of the book *The Writer's Journey*, viewed the villain as the "hero of his or her own story."[1] Within the world of Archie Comics and its gallery of characters, the villain has played a crucial part in the character development of its heroic archetype. For mainstay character *The Shield*, there have been villains over time that have inspired the type of hero he (or she, in the case of Victoria) has become. *The Shield* has graced the print medium for almost 100 years. The MLJ era found *The Shield* in a world facing a 1940s' Axis of Evil. The '50s-'60s Mighty Comics Group heroes faced evil in a world of campiness. The 1980s re-emphasized the anti-hero, and by the turn of the century, the more contemporary and thought-provoking villain emerged. This paper provides an analysis of the types of villains that have challenged *The Shield*, the inspirations for their villainy, and how these villains carried out their particularly devious plots to make their world better places despite facing *The Shield*.

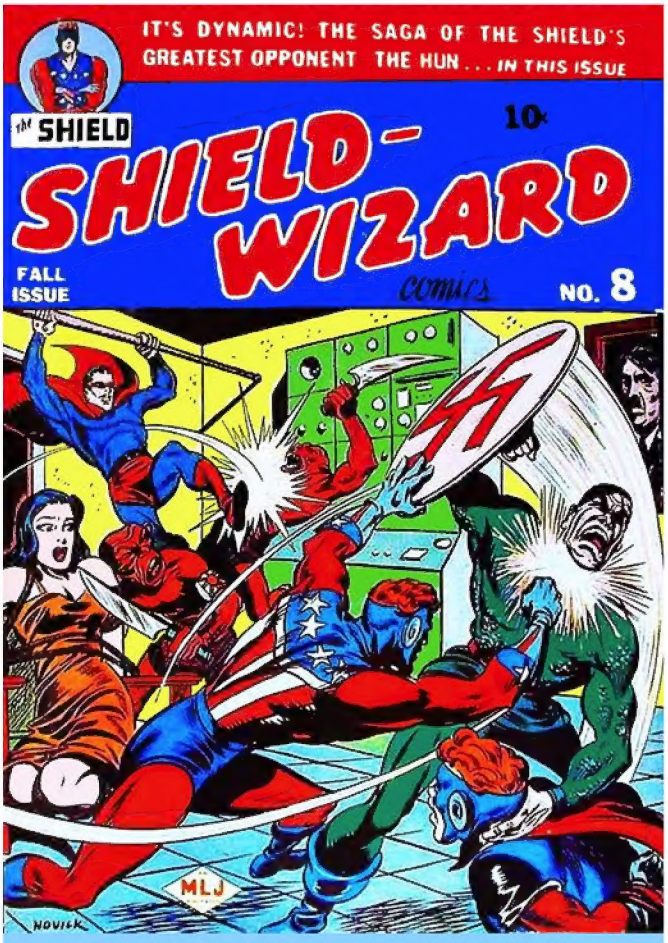


Figure 1 – Shield-Wizard comics #8, August 1942[2]

Merriam-Webster defines the villain as "a character in a story or play who opposes the hero."[3] Director Joss Whedon challenged this notion, stating, "who is to say who is the villain and who is the hero? Probably a dictionary."[4] To Whedon's credit, it is left to the reader (or a dictionary) to interpret which role within any story is truly the villain. In many cases, the villain is a wronged individual seeking justice, acts out of fear or desperation, desires fame and fortune, or acts because said actions are justified within the villain's community. Within the Archie Comics universe, readers have automatically presumed that *The Shield* was the hero for years, placing those who oppose *The Shield* as the villain, regardless of motivation. Is this presumption correct and fair to the "villain"?

The United States Department of Homeland Security's Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) cites five responsibilities all United States (U.S.) citizens are charged with upholding. One of these includes the mandate to "defend the country if the need should arise."[5] *The Shield* faced a German character called *The Strangler* during World War II.[6] Within this encounter, *The Strangler* was carrying out the commands of his head of state. In this case, that head of state was Adolf Hitler, who was deemed one of the top five most evil people in the history of the world.[7] For The Strangler, it is possible that, at the time, being of German descent, he was merely "defending his nation" as the need arose, and once called upon by his head of state, he followed orders to protect his nation's interests. In this case, it was to defeat *The Shield*. If the Nazi's Third Reich, and Adolf Hitler, were removed from the discussion, would *The Strangler's* actions have been villainous if the intention was to defend his homeland?

Figure 2 – The Strangler, from Pep Comics #30, August 1942[8]

For many decades, *The Brain Emperor* challenged both *The Shield* as well as his affiliated supergroup, *The Mighty Crusaders*. *The Brain Emperor* was the ruler of the planet K-Shazor until its citizens sparked an uprising, overthrowing the dictator. *The Brain Emperor* left his home-world and sought world domination on Earth. In the 1980s, The Brain Emperor sought to rule Earth through the defeat of his most challenging opponents, *The Mighty Crusaders,*[9] led by *The Shield*. *The Brain Emperor* was continually defeated. However, would a unified Earth with a singularly minded head of state lead the planet to global peace? Dr. Catherine Lu, Professor of Political Science at McGill University, theorized that such a "world government" would

be attainable, albeit under ideal conditions.[10] The real concern would be with who would be permitted to lead such a world government, and for many, *The Brain Emperor* would not be an ideal choice. Could The Brain Emperor learn from his mistakes on K-Shazor, and alter his form of leadership to provide a more peaceful Earth?

Figure 3 – The Brain Emperor, from The Mighty Crusaders Website[11]

Religious freedoms can motivate individuals to carry out many actions in the name of their beliefs. A 2016 Pew Research Center study concluded that religion in everyday life could inspire individuals to protect the environment, help those in need, and, most importantly, believe in God.[12] How they elect to provide such altruistic forms of assistance varies by the individual. To some, forms of religious fanaticism carried out by individuals would be misinterpreted as threatening despite the person's presumed good intentions. In 2018, within the Archie Comics Universe, *The Druid* brought forth a complex strategy to revive *Eternos*, a deity that would potentially unite the world under one religious vision.[13] Victoria Adams, the first female *Shield*, helped in the gathering of a new team of *Mighty Crusaders* to confront *The Druid*. Her personal beliefs ran counter to those of *The Druid*, and within the subsequent onslaught, *The Shield's* beliefs prevailed. Religious exclusivism, or the belief that one specific religion is "true," and all others are faulty, challenges which beliefs are accurate, and which are counter to public endorsement. In *The Druid's* case, were his motivations, inspired by his religious exclusivism, to bring forth the second coming of *Eternos*, faulty or the correct path to unite the world under the one true religion?

Figure 4: The Druid, from The Mighty Crusaders Website[14]

While *The Strangler*, *The Brain Emperor*, and *The Druid* have been publicly deemed "villains" within the comic book medium, the debate continues as to whether their actions within the Archie Comics were justified. Individual beliefs, patriotism, and world views influence public opinion, and those who challenge these opinions create friction. It is within this friction that the continued excitement of Archie Comics remains. As long as fans continue to read *The Shield*, *The Mighty Crusaders*, and other characters of the Archie Comics Universe, they will continue to cheer the "Heroes" and vilify those who oppose them.

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The Beginner's Cyber Guide to MLJ

by Joseph Kessler Adams

If you weren't born in time for the Silver Age of comics—from the appearance of the Barry Allen "Flash" in Showcase #8 to the mid-1970s, when the end of the comics industry was predicted (again)—you may feel you've missed out on a lot.

But it isn't too late.

If you find an attraction to the unique flavor of the MLJ/Archie Adventure Comics, or Radio/Mighty Comics, or the Red Circle, or the Impact line from DC, or the Dark Circle cycle that is the most recent reincarnation of the heroes of those days, it is not too late. Thanks to fanzines, web pages, and YouTube, you can saturate yourself in the world of MLJ like the old folks.

I was born in 1950, which gave me a chance to see some of the premier Silver Age appearances. I remember picking up the first Hal Jordan-Green Lantern appearance in Showcase and the first appearance of Dr. Strange in Strange Tales, with all the class first appearances and growth of comic book stories from "something for the kiddies" to complex stories of teen-aged angst and confused self-identity (not to mention the sexuality).

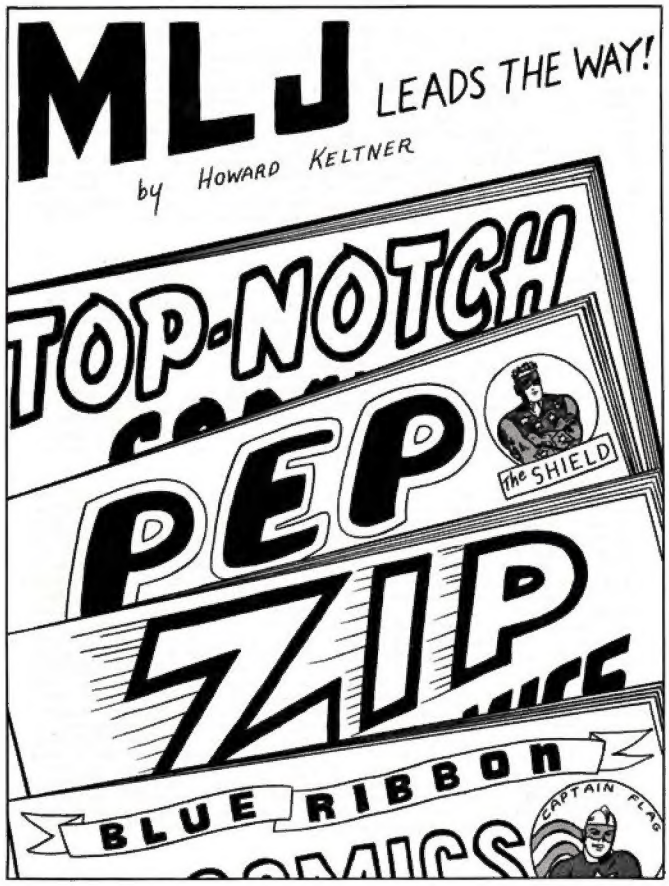
But with the expansion of DC, the transition from Atlas to Marvel, and the brief fireball that was Charlton, there was the Archie Adventure Series, which introduced me to the slightly elevated stories of Joe Simon and the superior art of Jack Kirby, two long-established pros who had grown up with the comic book industry.

I did not know there was a world before the Silver Age, though my parents tried to tell me. I thought they were kidding when they told me about the Green Hornet or The Shadow. My real exposure to the MLJ characters was in an early fanzine—ALTER EGO #4—with an article by devoted fan and member of The Texas Trio, Howard Keltner. In his own amateur comic, *Star-Studded Comics*, Keltner had published his own version of the MLJ character Mr. Justice, dubbed Dr. Weird. But before I saw Dr. Weird, I read Keltner's write-up on the little publishing house that began with lurid pulp magazines, briefly flourishing as the MLJ Comics line, and falling into a postwar rut with the prototypical teenager, Archie. And his pals. Lots of pals.

But for a brief and shining moment, there was MLJ.

You can get the same exposure to the original article that had introduced me to the heroes of PEP, TOP NOTCH, BLUE RIBBON, ZIP, and JACKPOT COMICS. You may not be able to visit one of the first "old comic book" shops (Cherokee in Hollywood, CA) to buy some of those old issues at $3-$5 each (outrageous at the time), but you can read the stories and see the pictures. You might even develop a fondness for the characters.

Download ALTER EGO #4 for free from



comicbookplus.com with a free signup, and you might want some of the dozens of other MLJ issues available to enjoy at the same price. You can also enjoy nine more issues of the early ALTER EGO, and hundreds of other non-MLJ titles. And free is something most of us can afford.

MLJ Leads the Way — Alter Ego #4

https://comicbookplus.com/?dlid=22005

And hundreds of other cool downloads, including original MLJ comics. You can read the originals. Your friends may wonder what happened to you because you haven't been seen in weeks, yourself— reading so much.

Alter Ego was the first comics-only fanzine, even though Xero had a comics column earlier—Xero was a science fiction fanzine. A-E marked the first time people focused on casual little journalistic forays into the four-color world. Jerry Bails, the publisher of A-E (with Roy Thomas) actually moved more into the academic study of comic books.

But MLJ was one of the first topics to get this respectful, journalistic, and affectionate exposure to the DC-Marvel crop of comic fans that was developing.

I was able to afford some Golden Age comics of my own, and a few of those were PEP, ZIP, and my personal favorite (because of the Howard Keltner article), JACKPOT. And you can download all of the Issues of this classic at

https://comicbookplus.com/?dlid=22595

It was the dawning of the age of photo-offset, but the

"ditto" master—the spirit duplication school copier—was the technology of choice for people who loved any particular genre of comics, and the love of the MLJ/Archive Adventure characters was there throughout. Star Studded Comics, Fantasy Hero, Heroes Hangout, Masquerader, Komix Illustrated, Down Under (Australian comics), The Komix (South African from later pro John Wright), and more appeared in my mailbox month after month. GB Love, through the SFWA and Rocket's Blast/Comicollector (a merged zine), moved his zine from a simple mimeograph and ditto zine to a full offset channel that connected hundreds of fans, which caused this new generation to encourage each other and improve their craft. People like Jim Starlin, George R.R. Martin, Bill Dubay, Landon Chesney, Don Rosa, and dozens of long-admired professionals mixed and created a whole new breed of comic books.

Before the Internet, I found dozens of other people doing fanzines. One, Rich Buckler, publisher of a couple of ditto-zines—SUPER-HERO and INTRIGUE COMICS—would become one of the movers and shakers in the later iterations of the MLJ tree. Rich was drawing based on what he could copy from his favorite artist—Jack Kirby—but he was copying well. His writing was a notch above the other fan authors in the dozens of amateur zines with circulations under 200 each. He pushed and was responsible for the whole Red Circle version of the revived titles. He knew how to give proper art direction to solid, upper-crust comic artists, like Steve Ditko, Alex Toth, Rudy Nebres, Alex Nino and more. But his original fertile ground was comic fandom.

The Internet offered new ways to channel the next generation of zines, including the regrowth of Alter Ego through the late master, Bill Shelley. Bill collected the original works from fandom and translated them into clean, offset magazines that could carry the journalistic approach established by Jerry Bails and the full "gosh, wow" that drove new fans into the pleasure of our chosen hobbies.

And through the zines and the Internet itself, MLJ kept its footing and continued to grow.

YouTube provided a channel, and several producers (such as *ComicgeddonTV*) came up with their own personal takes on the MLJ mythos. They are now foundation documentaries to introduce people to the history and the mythos of MLJ.

In addition to YouTube, Archive.org provides downloads that can give you the experience of listening to the Black Hood, the only MLJ character to make it into the most significant entertainment mass medium of the day… radio.

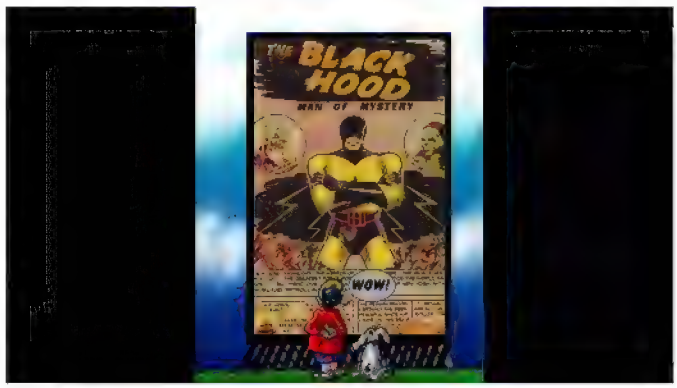
https://archive.org/details/otr_blackhood

A YouTube channel—The *PD Comic Book Network*—offers some short videos to cover MLJ characters, including the Comet and some minor ones, plus the Blue Beetle. There may be something in the series that you would appreciate as you develop your MLJ muscle.

The final link gives a .zip archive with *all* of the surviving radio programs, curated by the Old Time Radio Researchers (OTRR) volunteer corps of engineers. This can lead you to the other radio heroes that entered the comic book, pulp, and radio files—The Green Hornet and The Shadow (who had a tragic resurrection as a spandex-wearing superhero in the days of the Radio Comics revival).

ComicgeddonTV
The Mighty Crusaders - The Age of MLJ
https://youtu.be/bqazWXPMlwA

PD Comic Book Network
Hercules, Modern Champion of Justice (Blue Ribbon Comics #4)
https://youtu.be/wECymazeeAI



PD Comic Book Network
MLJ's The Black Hood (Top-Notch Comics #9
https://youtu.be/qw7BtyzOfiw

Old Time Radio Researchers Group
The Blue Beetle
https://archive.org/details/OTRR_Certified_Blue_Beetle

Chris Malgrain the Crusading Artist

interview by Rik Offenberg

Shield G-Man Club: When did you start reading American comics?

Chris Malgrain: In the 1970s, at the age of 8 or 9, in the 130-page black and white pocket comics that were so popular in France. They contained material from Italy, France, England, and the US and covered all genres: sci-fi, war, western, humor, jungle, pirates, medieval, etc. with a few superheroes. The Marvel and DC heroes were published in bigger-sized anthologies in color. I started reading them when I was 9.

SGMG: What attracted you to them?

Chris: Their dynamism, and then, when I got into superheroes, their colorful costumes, and superpowers, as well as the huge cities in which their adventures took place. At the age of 9, I already knew I wanted to be a comic book artist and when I discovered all those superheroes, I decided I'd draw this kind of comics in America one day. I started learning English the following year at school and my comic book dream became easier.

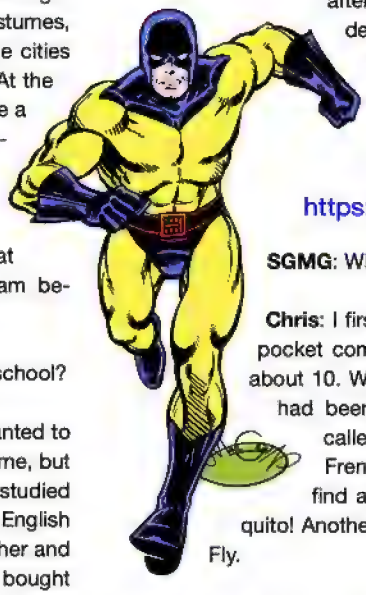
SGMG: Where did you go to art school?

Chris: I chose artistic classes in Junior High and after that wanted to go to the only comic art school that existed in France at the time, but it was way too expensive, so I went to university instead and studied English. Not only the language but literature, American and English history, and civilization, etc. Four years later, I became a teacher and continued drawing in parallel. I'm a self-taught artist. I bought anatomy and perspective books and drew as much as I could. I started drawing my first comics on school copybooks when I was 7. I drew hundreds of pages and I think that's what gave me the sense of story-telling that people say I have.

SGMG: When did you break into Comics?

Chris: I worked in French and Belgian fanzines besides teaching, and got my first assignment with a professional publisher in my late 20s. That publisher was Semic, formerly called Lug, who had published so many of the black and white pocketbooks and Marvel comics that had filled my childhood with wonder! I was very happy to draw some of the French and Italian characters I grew up with. One of my editors at Semic was Jean-Marc Lofficier, who wrote some stories for Marvel and DC and who was Moebius' collaborator and agent for a while. One day, he told me via email that ibooks, Inc. the company run by the late Byron Preiss, was looking for artists. I emailed them samples and was hired immediately. The book I did with them was Stan Lee's *Alexa*. Yes, Stan Lee, my idol! Not only did my American Dream become a reality, but I also met The Man at San Diego 2004, and signed a preview of the book with him! I was working for a popular French magazine back then and continued working for it after my adventure with Stan. A few years ago, I decided to only do what I love, and so I quit French Comics. I've worked with Arcana, Red Anvil and many other indie publishers. I also publish my line of retro comics, which can be found at

https://IndyPlanet.com/Oniric-Comics



SGMG: When did you discover the Mighty Crusaders?

Chris: I first discovered the Fly's solo adventures in the pocket comics, and later the Crusaders in color. I was about 10. What is funny about the Fly is that if his name had been normally translated, he would have been called La Mouche, but this sounds ridiculous in French, and since the publisher was not able to find a good French name, the Fly became...Mosquito! Another English word, but easier to pronounce than Fly.

SGMG: How did you get involved with Organic Comix?

Chris: I met Organic's founder, Reed Man, at a convention, and sometime later he was hired by Semic too. We met more often and he became my colorist on *The Rovers* (which was published by Arcana in the US) for another publisher. Reed is a writer/artist/colorist/publisher and we naturally got to collaborate on his Organic Comix.

Welcome to SGMCF #5
and the new (and old)
G-MAN COMICS

by Jim Burrows

Well, "everything new is old again," as they say. Actually, no, they don't, but I will.

If you're the sort that reads the indicia at the front of zines, then you may have noticed the line that reads, "Published occasionally by G-Man Comics." If so, you might have wondered what, exactly, "G-Man Comics" is, and where you could find it outside of the indicia. Well, wonder no more! G-Man Comics is here, but not just "here in the front of this 'zine", but on the East Coast and the West Coast, on the Web, and on the phone system. We have staff, business cards, multiple publications, and a bright shiny new logo.

G-Man Comics on the web and in the mail

Rik says: G-Man comics started out as the fictitious publisher of fictitious Agent Shield mock covers. The idea was to do 100 mock covers with Mitch Kwok in which Agent Shield would team up with the MLJ heroes. It was inspired by Kevin Moorhead's work with Mighty Crusaders covers. Eric Bennett introduced me to Gilbert Monsanto who did Who's Who images from several of the original characters created by members of the Shield G-Man Club. Jim Burrows came along and agreed to edit and do the production work, and in August of 2019 **G-Man Comics** was born, with the *Who's Who Handbook of the G-Man Universe* published the following month. We thought it was one and done. Three months later, we began this fanzine. Again, it was planned as a one-shot for the Shield's 80th Anniversary. However, we kept going month after month. You are holding the fifth fanzine; The Demon Priest ashcan is at the printer now, and Gilbert Monsanto is hard at work on the art for an actual physical Agent Shield comic. We are planning several other new projects as well. We went from a fictitious idea into an actual micro-publisher—it wasn't a plan but it is a fact. You can find us online at our new G-Man-Comics.com website, on Facebook at facebook.-com/gmancomics and Twitter as @GManComics1. We are small but Mighty.

Coming soon from G-Man Comics

Jim says: And… there's more coming from G-Man Comics! Not only are we working on future issues of the Shield G-Man Club Fanzine, but Rik and I each have new projects in the works.

As club members and anyone who read issue #4 know, Rik has been publishing a lengthy series of *faux* covers for Agent Shield comics. Soon, they will be *faux* no more, as Rik, with the aid of artist Gilbert Monsanto, will be bringing Agent Shield to Kickstarter and then a full 32-page comic. Watch this space.

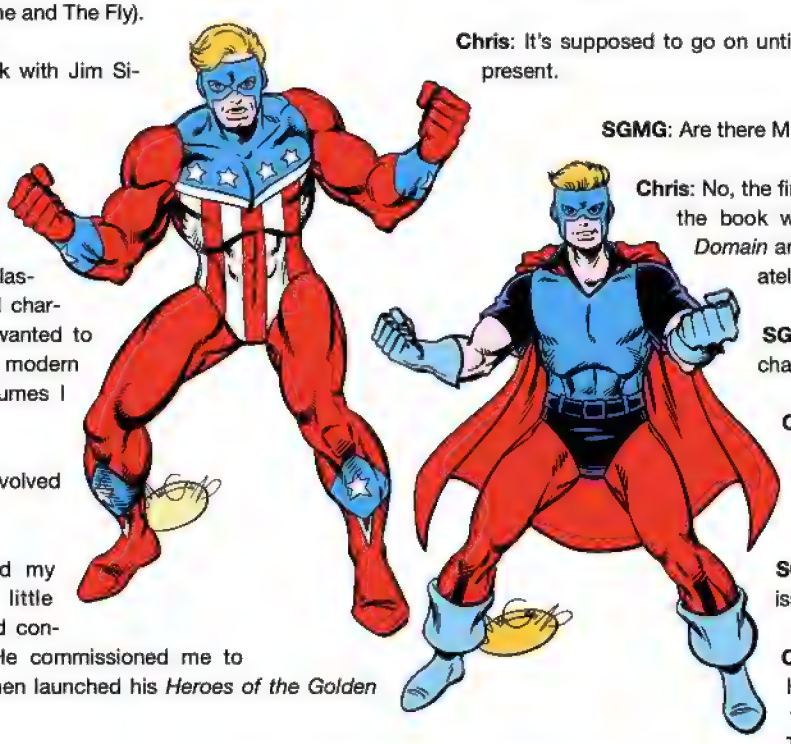
For my part, I'm working on my second novel. This one, entitled *The Demon Priest,* is set in a world of superheroes. As such, I thought it might be appropriate to use the comic book format to introduce the character and build interest in the novel. To that end, G-Man Comics will be publishing an 8-page 'zine in a format similar to the *Who's Who of the G-Man Universe*. The *Demon Priest Preview* will contain a two-page comic introduction to the character, the first few pages of the novel and profile pages of the Demon Priest and some of the supporting characters. The art, naturally enough, will be courtesy of Gilbert Monsanto, and HeroMachine wielded by yours truly.

SGMG: Did you get to work on any of the Joe Simon characters at Organic Comix?

Chris: I only did an illustration of Spider-Fly (a combination of Kirby's original Spider-Man's costume and The Fly).

SGMG: Did you get to work with Jim Simon?

Chris: Jim offered me to work on his characters and I was initially very interested in drawing them because I thought he wanted to do classical comics. I drew several characters but he told me he wanted to transform his heroes into modern ones with the kind of costumes I don't like, so I quit.



SGMG: How did you get involved with Temporal Comics?

Chris: Darrin Wiltshire liked my Oniric Comics, my own little company, on Indyplanet and contacted me on Facebook. He commissioned me to draw his own heroes and then launched his *Heroes of the Golden Age* line.

SGMG: How many characters have you drawn for their Who's Who?

Chris: About 170. Seven issues. The fourth one is about to come out.

SGMG: How many issues are planned for the series?

Chris: It's supposed to go on until there are no more characters to present.

SGMG: Are there MLJ characters in all the issues?

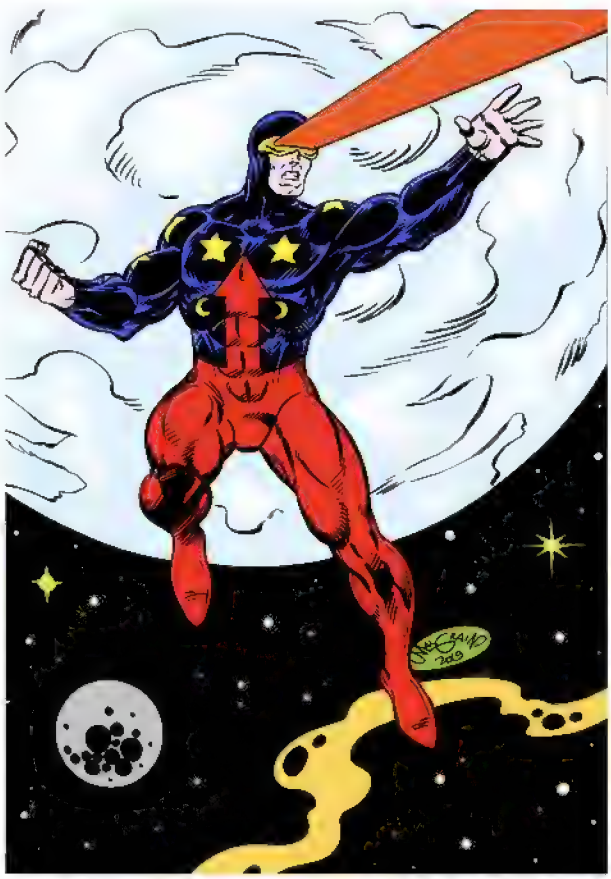
Chris: No, the first ones appear in Issue 7. Initially, the book was called *Heroes of The Public Domain* and I drew dozens of them immediately.

SGMG: Who are your favorite MLJ characters?

Chris: I'd say the Fly, for nostalgic reasons, and then the Shield and the Comet, whose costume looks great to me.

SGMG: What's coming up in future issues?

Chris: More MLJ, and since this is Heroes of the Golden Age, I'd love to include Namor, the Human Torch, Captain America, etc. Not sure this will happen, but I'd love that! The first three issues are available at IndyPlanet.com/Temporal-Comics



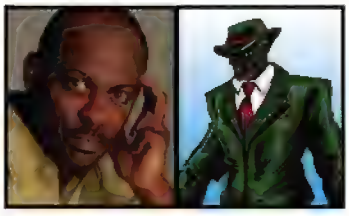
RED CIRCLE INVESTIGATIONS

A Mighty Crusaders Fan Film

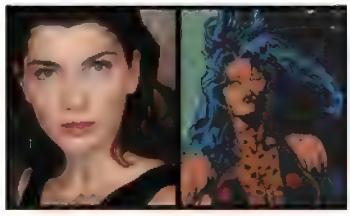
Low-Budget and No-Budget filmmaking can be a difficult task at times. But the end results are typically so exciting and enriching that it makes the entire process worth it. With RED CIRCLE INVESTIGATIONS, the first fan film to feature characters from The Mighty Crusaders, we've certainly experienced our share of difficult times. Everything from starts and stops to cast members having emergency medical situations. And that doesn't seem to be going away. Now, with much of the country under 'Stay-At-Home' orders due to the Covid-19 virus, principal photography has once again been postponed. But that isn't going to stop this film!

What this has afforded us is more pre-production time, which will only serve to make the final film that much better. It is giving us the opportunity to fine-tune costumes and props, lock in cast members, and perfect our storyboards and light plans. That being said, we thought we would share some of those very things with you here. What you will find over the next few pages are insights into the film and the process. Here, in this magazine, we are taking the opportunity to announce the cast members for the primary lead roles. These are just the main characters. Trust us, there will be many more surprises in the final film. We also are sharing the storyboards for a brief peek at one segment of the film, as well as production costume designs and pieces in progress. And finally, we are offering the official first look at actress Taylor Pietz's Jaguar costume test.

This is not a setback for our film but rather a 'set up' for an even better finished product. Stay tuned for future updates and as always... stay Mighty, friends!



Don McClendon as Walter Whitney

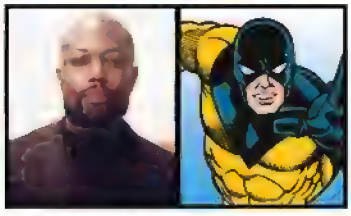


Taylor Pietz as Maria Hardy / Jaguar II

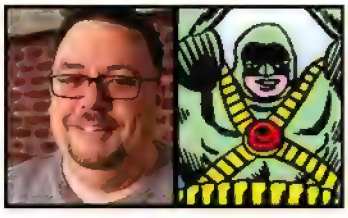
Alan Knoll as Maurice

Jason Contini as The Shield

John Contini as Robert Dickering / The Hangman (modern day)

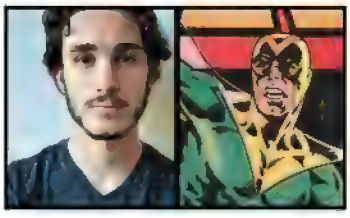


Reggie Reese as Matthew Burland / Black Hood I

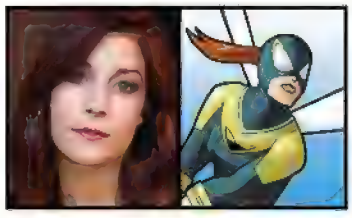


Nicholas J. Hearne as The Eraser (modern day)

Wyatt Weed as Ralph Hardy / Jaguar I



Dustin Petrillo as Thomas Troy / The Fly



Larissa White as Kim Brand / Fly-Girl

Michael Amoroso as John Dickering / The Comet

Nathan Contini as Robert Dickering / The Hangman (flashbacks)

STORYBOARDS

You have to ride a fine line when it comes to storyboards. You don't want to have to follow them to the letter, but you also don't want to approach a day on set without them. As a director and a director of photography, the best course of action is to view a storyboard as a loose blueprint that is always evolving. Storyboards provide a great starting point so that you know exactly where you'll be setting camera and lights. But sometimes, once you're on location, things may not work the way you or your crew initially envisioned. In those circumstances, you must be able and ready to think on the move.

Because of that, we have never really spent a tremendous amount of time making detailed storyboards. For us, as long as we have a basic blueprint to work off of, we're good to go. So what you see here are six storyboards that show a brief sequence from the film that hints at the initial thoughts regarding lighting and camera placement or movement. You see things like 'V.O' which is a note to the audio crew that this line of dialogue will be 'voice over'. It also will show the camera operator where the starting frame and finishing frames are on a moving 'dolly' shot; as indicated in these boards with a solid red arrow.

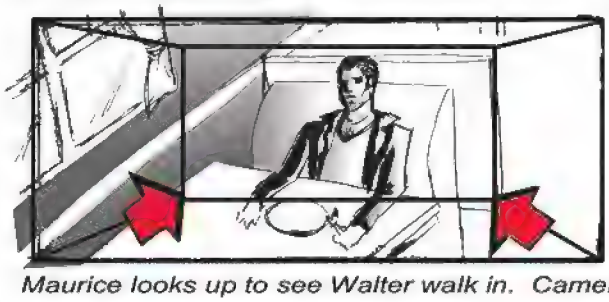
This scene takes place nearly halfway through the film. Private Investigator Walter Whitney goes to the Top Notch Diner for information. This scene is also the only scene in the film that features an original character. The character of Maurice has been created for this film and, even though most fans will already pick up on this without us saying so, he is also named after Maurice Coyne, one of the three founders of MLJ Comics.

Establishing shot of diner:
Walter arrives at the Top Notch Diner.

WALTER V.O.
'This was already starting out to be a strange case...'

Medium Wide
WALTER V.O.
'...so I figured if there was anyone in Capitol City that would have the 411 on strange things or even just seedy dealings, it would be Maurice. Lucky for me, I knew exactly where he would be.'

Walter walks in the front door. He sees Maurice in the back booth and walks towards him. Camera dollies back with him.



Maurice looks up to see Walter walk in. Camera dollies in towards him at booth.

Close-up
WALTER:
'How's the pie, Maurice?'

'Awww, shit.'

Close-up
MAURICE:
'What do you want, Whitney? I'm trying to enjoy my evening coffee in peace.'

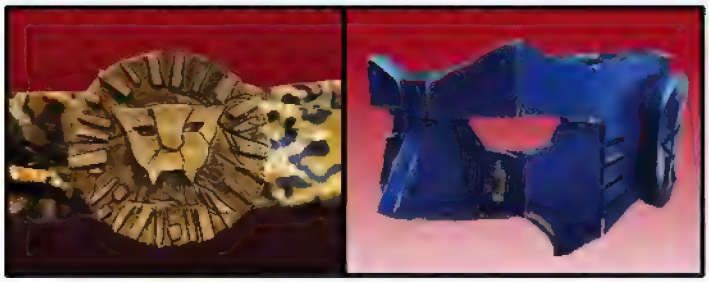
(L to R) Hangman (flashback); Fly; Fly-Girl; Black Hood I; The Shield; Walter Whitney; Jaguar II; Eraser (modern) Hangman (modern); Jaguar I; The Comet

COSTUME DESIGNS

What works on paper in comics doesn't always translate well to screen. Lead Designer Nathan Contini was tasked with taking the iconic designs of The Mighty Crusaders and finding a way to make them practical and modern without losing the elements that make these heroes who they are. In addition, he had the added chore of doing modern day designs and flashback designs for some characters.

Looking at every incarnation of these characters throughout the years, Nathan took the primary elements and designs for each and mixed them with aspects of other past relaunches. In some cases, he took full inspiration from a specific relaunch design but altered the colors so that the costume would also connect to the costumes from the comics that are most known.

Work in progress costume tests
Above: Taylor Pietz as The Jaguar II
Right: Taylor Pietz as The Jaguar II



Props/costume pieces above:
Picture one: The Jaguar belt and buckle
Picture two: The Shield Helmet

EB
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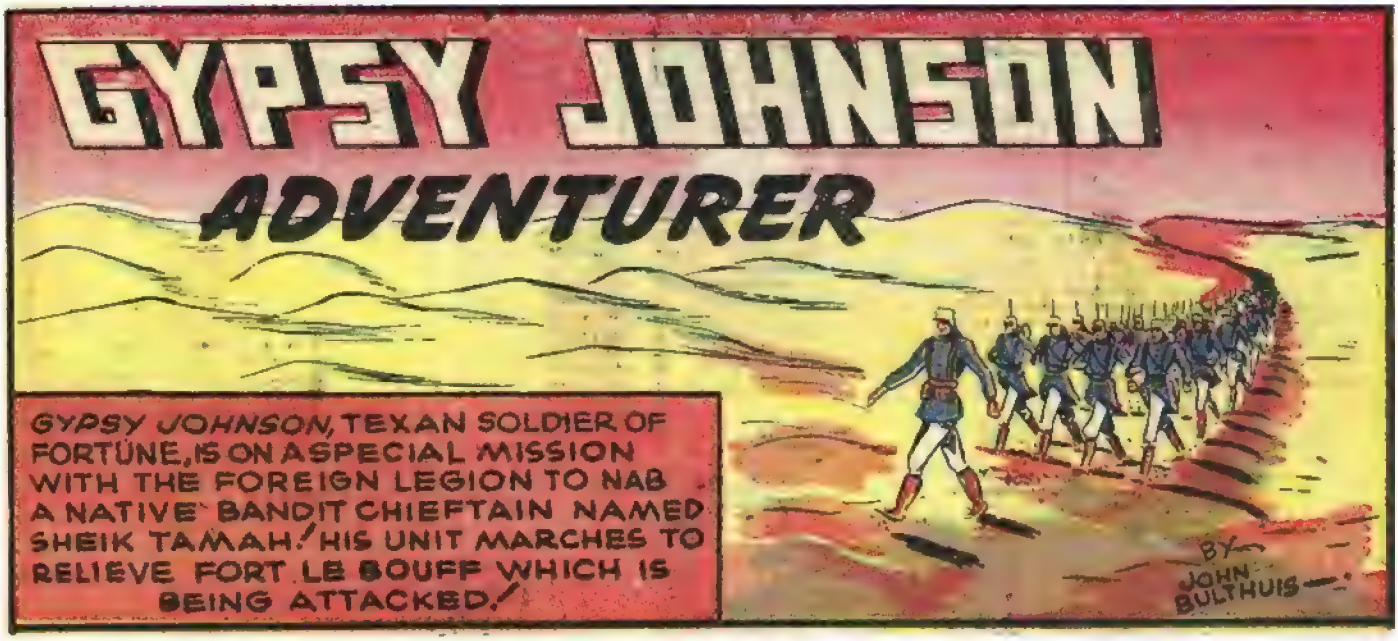
FANTASY SILVER AGE TEAM UP

Gypsy Johnson, Adventurer

From French Foreign Legion to Freewheeling Explorer


GYPSY JOHNSON
ADVENTURER
GYPSY JOHNSON, TEXAN SOLDIER OF FORTUNE, IS ON A SPECIAL MISSION WITH THE FOREIGN LEGION TO NAB A NATIVE BANDIT CHIEFTAIN NAMED SHEIK TAMAH! HIS UNIT MARCHES TO RELIEVE FORT LE BOUFF WHICH IS BEING ATTACKED!
BY JOHN BULTHUIS

by Kevin Noel Olson

Debuting in Blue Ribbon Comics #4, March 1940, the soldier of fortune from Texas, Gypsy Johnson, joined the French Foreign Legion to pit his skills against Sheik Tamah. The forces under the Muslim chieftain persist in attacking Fort Le Boeuf.

After routing the enemy, Gypsy speaks to the radio operator and discovers that the aerial was damaged in the attack. This leaves the Legionnaires without hope of outside aid from Legion forces. Gypsy Johnson rides his horse to attempt to sneak by the base of Tamah's forces and out into the perilous expanse of open desert to attempt to deliver a message to headquarters. Gypsy's escapade leads to his captivity, awaiting torture and likely death at the hands of Tamah's men. Gypsy escapes, steals a horse, and rides to Camp Cordovo, bringing the full strength of the French forces there.

BY THE SIGN OF ALLAH I'LL FIX THOSE INFIDELS!
THE LEADER OF THE BANDIT FORCE, SHEIK TAMAH, HIMSELF, SWEARS REVENGE FOR HIS DEFEAT!

Gypsy Johnson returns during the battle, flying gunner in a biplane. He heroically leaps out and right on the back of Sheik Tamah, taking the chieftain off his horse. This story concludes Gypsy Johnson's thrills as a member of the Foreign Legion, yet his adventures continue.

In issue #5, he goes to "French" Morocco where he encounters an attempt to kidnap Dorothy Collier and sell her as a slave. After the daring rescue, he discovers that Dorothy's ne'er-do-well brother, Leonard, drank and gambled away their money and left them stranded. Dorothy contacted the siblings' aunt, who wired them money. Gypsy accompanies the Colliers on an ill-fated ship that crashes on the rocky shoals of an uncharted island.

Baron Von Krasner reveals himself to be the wealthy, reclusive owner of the island. He captures the trio and holds them on his island for a gruesome game of hunting Gypsy and Leonard as live game. With his pack of hunting dogs and his assistant, Solti, Krasner tracks the men across the isolated island. Leonard maintains his cowardice and treachery, Johnson saving him despite all, for the sake of Dorothy. Af-

ter Gypsy overpowers Krasner and changes clothes with the unconscious hunter, Krasner is attacked by the dogs. Solti tries to rescue the baron but is likewise attacked and killed.

The group is subsequently rescued by Captain Barnacle, whose chartered ship is running guns for a leader of a warring island tribe, Taku Umrat. The seafaring captain's intentions are spoiled when he discovers the weapons are to be used to attack innocent villagers. When Taku's men mutiny and attempt to kill the group, Barnacle and Gypsy manage to overcome them and eject them from the craft.

Captain Barnacle encourages Johnson and the Colliers to travel to an island off the coast of India, where lives a "crocodile worshipping race" possessing a vast treasure. Gypsy agrees to the terms of splitting the wealth, while Leonard plots to betray Gypsy and the captain. The Colliers hold a rope while the captain

SHE IS BEAUTIFUL!
YES, SHE WILL BRING A HANDSOME PRICE IN THE SLAVE MARKET!
I'M BARON VON KRASNER, IT WAS I WHO LURED YOUR SHIP ON THOSE ROCKS. THIS IS MY ISLAND, YOU SEE, I AM PARTICULAR WHO ARE MY GUESTS!

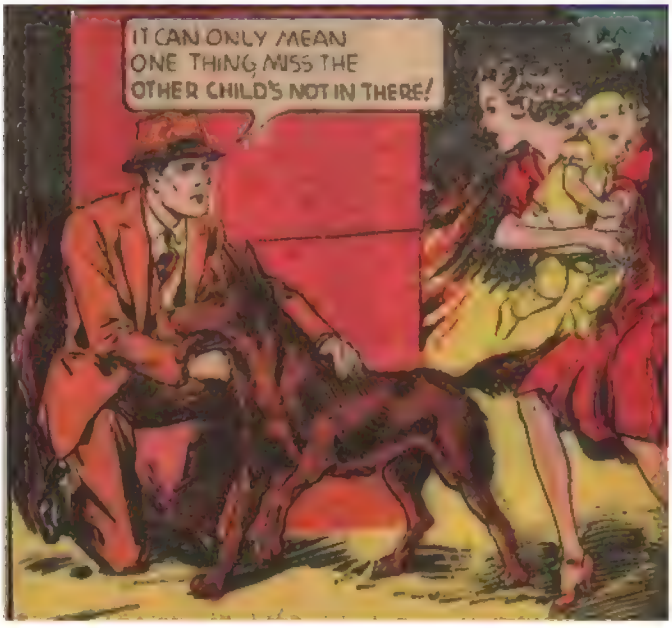
and Johnson descend through a hole, the entrance to the underground complex. When the adherents of the reptile god appear, Leonard saves his own bacon by dropping the rope and escaping, despite Dorothy's protestations.

Confronted by the Crocodile Worshippers, Barnacle and Gypsy Johnson unconsciously hold a torch next to their crocodile-idol. The cult bows in reverential awe as the statue begins to melt, permitting Gypsy and the captain to escape up a narrow passageway. Gypsy notes that his gunfire caused a vibratory reaction. He uses the weapon to cause a collapse of the Temple, thus trapping the cult long enough to get away. Before leaving, Captain Barnacle and Gypsy Johnson punish Leonard for his treachery by chiding the traitor with a stick. To add insult to Leonard's injury, Gypsy makes his intentions known to donate the sum of the treasure to the Red Cross. Thus end the adventures of Gypsy Johnson.

The Loves of Detective Speed

by Kevin Noel Olson

Debuting in 1939, Detective Hy Speed and Rang-a-Tang were the only two characters to appear in all issues of Blue Ribbon Comics. The creation of the German Shepherd and the detective began with Norman Danberg, supported with Ed Ashe's artwork. Hy is only mentioned in issue #7 as he is recuperating from a wound incurred in the previous comic. Even if this issue is excluded, it's enough to beat out any other human character in the run of the comic book, with The Fox and Corporal Collins starting in issue #4 to continue through the final issue.

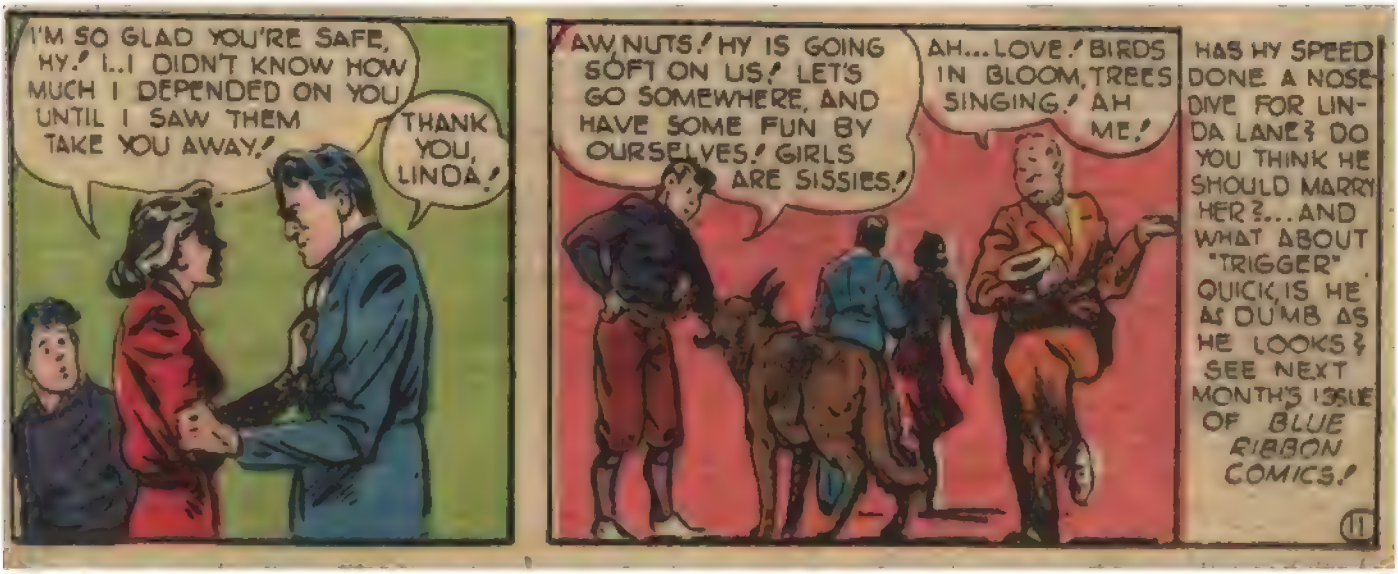


In issue #2, Detective Speed and Rang-a-Tang help Gail Steele, the governess for the Vandermeer children. When there is a fire at the Vandermeer mansion, it's discovered one of two toddlers is missing. While there is no significant romantic involvement, Gail and Hy spend a great deal of time together as the trail leads to the recovery of the child at a remote cabin in Canada.

Jack Binder and Will Harr take over as creative team for issue #3. In this, Detective Speed is revealed to have a "girl friend". Sally runs (or owns) a luncheonette. Sally is kidnapped by gangsters. Hy tries to rescue her and is also captured. The gangsters use dynamite to blow the pair up, but Rang-a-Tang grabs the bomb and rescues them from harm. This is Sally's only appearance, although there is obviously some romantic fire between the pair. When they are confronted by gangsters, Sally throws in with Hy to fight side-by-side. Binder and Harr leave the Rang-a-Tang creative position. Joe Blair took over the writing with Ed Smalle's art in issue #4. The Blair/Smalle team continues throughout the series, with Warren King stepping in as artist on an issue. It seems likely that, if the Binder/Harr team had continued, Sally would have become a substantial character.

Detective Speed is a capable, no-nonsense detective. When we discuss the attachments of his heart, we must recognize the strong and continuing bond between Hy and Rang-a-Tang which begins in issue #1. Rang-a-Tang rescues Speed from gangsters that intend to kill the law enforcer.

The detective feels brotherly affection for child actor Richy Waters, the Amazing Boy. Richy meets Hy and Rang in issue #6 and maintains the bond of friendship throughout the 22-issue run. Richy helps Hy and Rang take out pro-Nazi bundsters on a movie set. Richy returns an undying admiration for Hy. Hy not only takes up the role of Richy's big brother, he becomes a guardian of a type. Richy's parents are never revealed. It's worth noting that Richy appeared in September


I'M SO GLAD YOU'RE SAFE, HY! I..I DIDN'T KNOW HOW MUCH I DEPENDED ON YOU UNTIL I SAW THEM TAKE YOU AWAY!
THANK YOU, LINDA!
AW NUTS! HY IS GOING SOFT ON US! LET'S GO SOMEWHERE, AND HAVE SOME FUN BY OURSELVES! GIRLS ARE SISSIES!
AH... LOVE! BIRDS IN BLOOM, TREES SINGING! AH ME!
HAS HY SPEED DONE A NOSE-DIVE FOR LINDA LANE? DO YOU THINK HE SHOULD MARRY HER?... AND WHAT ABOUT "TRIGGER" QUICK, IS HE AS DUMB AS HE LOOKS? SEE NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE OF BLUE RIBBON COMICS!
11

of 1940, the Amazing Boy following the first appearance of Batman's sidekick. Robin, the Boy Wonder, appeared in April of the same year in Detective Comics #38. Detective Speed appears in November of 1939, 5 months after Batman's debut in May of that year.

Film actress Linda Lane first appears in Blue Ribbon #15, and she hits it off right away with Hy. Also debuting in the same issue is a comedy relief character, Trigger Quick. Hy's attraction to Linda Lane quickly causes friction with Richy, as it draws attention away from the boy and Rang. The question is posed of making her Mrs. Speed at the conclusion of the story. The matter is not brought up again. No letters in favor or against the idea of Hy's marriage to Linda appear in print. Up until Issue #17, Linda Lane is prominently featured. She disappears in issue #18, with Trigger Quick holding on until issue #20. The final two issues feature Rang-a-Tang, Richy, the Amazing Boy, Detective Hy Speed as the main characters. A character called "Miss Lane" appears in issue #21 as a mark for a charlatan of a medium called Dr. Sorrow. While the character could be Linda Lane, there is no clear indication and no interaction between her and Hy.

Examining the romantic options available to Hy Speed, there is some question if his position as a detective left room for a long-term relationship in his near future. Gail Steele certainly might have taken his heart, yet once their adventure concluded, so too did their connection. Sally came off as a very strong character, yet the departure of the creative team seemed to leave her in limbo. Linda Lane carried on with Hy for some time. The palpable romantic interest simply did not mesh into the life of the detective. If Blue Ribbon had had continued, it's possible Linda Lane might have returned.

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Lancelot Strong, Second Generation Shield

by Lou Mougin

Since creating Captain America in 1941, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby never seemed far away from patriotism.

Why not? Kids needed an embodiment of America to inspire them against Hitler. MLJ had done it first with the Shield. Cap was close behind, with Joe and Jack doing his first ten issues and a couple of *All-Winners Comics* stories before heading over to DC Comics, where they semi-cloned him as The Guardian in the Newsboy Legion series.

The Shield petered out in the postwar era, and Captain America made it to 1949 before ending in the superhero bust that year.

In the early Fifties, Simon and Kirby produced the shortlived *Fighting American* for Prize, a little-bought but well-loved Cold War satire with a Cap figure for the anti-Communist era. The stories are still fun to read but Fighting A has never been revived with much success.

Then, in 1959, with DC's *The Flash* paving the way for the second superhero boom, Archie Comics, née MLJ, decided to try them again. A safe bet was the Shield, probably their most popular Golden Age hero. Plus, of course, whatever else S&K could come up with, which included *The Fly*.

The result was a comic dated June 1959, and its title was *The Double Life of Private Strong.*

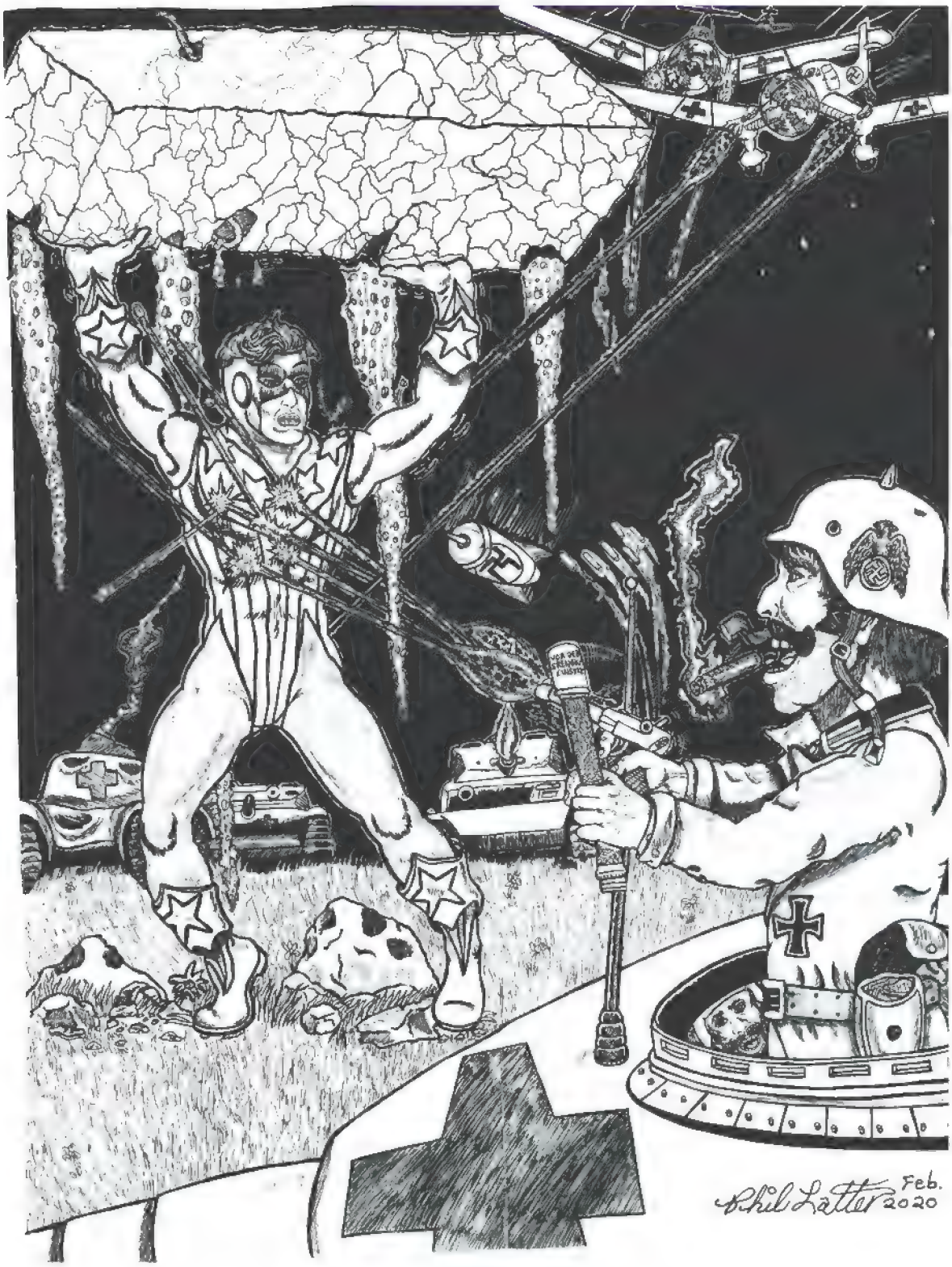
A cover blurb designated him *"The new action champ of comics!"* and a strip drawn to look like movie cels ran across the top and side of the cover, showing our hero in stop-motion action as he beat up on spies and then changed into an Army uniform and saluted. The main picture depicted said Private Strong doffing his G.I. gear and showing a red-and-white striped chest emblem topped with stars, and what showed of a purple (probably intended to be blue) shirt below it. He was looking to the right, where a couple of space aliens were trying to sabotage a missile base and shooting at two soldiers headed for them. Whoever Private Strong was, he had his mission cut out for him.

Back in '59, America was a much more conservative country than it became in the post-Kennedy years. Nobody was questioning the menace of Soviet Communism, and patriotism was the rule of the day. If you'd spoken out on behalf of the Commies, you might as well have been defending Nazis during World War II. That was the world that Lancelot Strong (the ultimate heroic name) walked into, and he inhabited it well.

The intro on page one showed us a great central Kirby figure of Strong in mask and red-white-and-blue uniform. On the sides, he was shown generating and hurling electrical bolts, dodging gunfire, being encased in a huge cube of ice, peering with his super-eyes through the darkness, and swimming beside sharks. A final caption gave us his *nom de guerre*: *"Begin the amazing, spine-tingling adventures of* The Shield*—a new and different type of hero who packs the punch of a hydrogen bomb!"*

Fan-Art

by Phil Latter

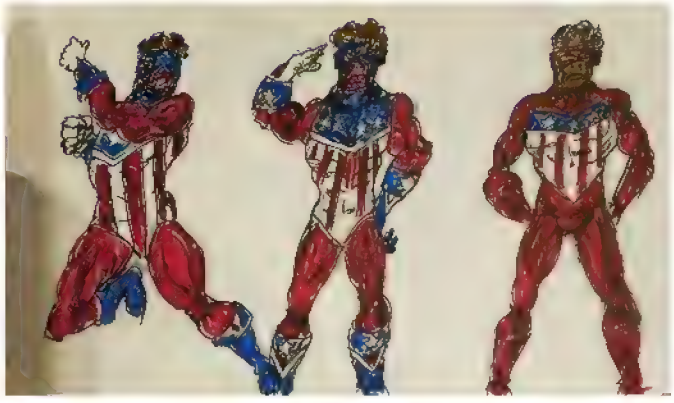


FAN-ART

by Allen Trembone &
Andrew James Christianson

Fan-Art Gallery

by John Fasano



Ben Cooper Fly Man Costume

by Rik Offenberger

Founded in 1937, Ben Cooper, Inc. was originally a Vaudeville and masquerade costume company in New York City, founded by brothers Ben and Nat Cooper. They became the largest and most prominent Halloween costume manufacturer in the United States. Its costumes were generally very thin fabric with a silk-screened image on the front. Ben Cooper sold its costumes through large retailers such as J. C. Penney, Sears, Woolworth's, and five-and-dime stores. Costumes often sold for $1.25.

In 1982, about a month before Halloween, one young girl and six adults died in the Chicago area after taking Extra Strength Tylenol laced with cyanide. To this day, the FBI doesn't know who was behind the tampered medicine, but the incident set off a nationwide panic, not just in the pharmaceutical industry, but in the Halloween industry as well. Parents worried that if someone could poison unsuspecting consumers with bottles of Tylenol, he or she could do the same thing with candy.

This downturn in sales ultimately led to their demise. The company spent 10 months a year manufacturing costumes that were used one night a year. The loss of sales was catastrophic. October 30, 1991, Ben Cooper, Inc. filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and was bought by Rubie's Costume Co. in 1992.

Products made by Ben Cooper, Inc. remain highly collectible. Collectors primarily look for the boxed costumes with the mask. Ira Cooper, son of original co-founder Nat Cooper, and his partner Jon Miller planned on relaunching the company in 2018.

In 1966, when the live-action Batman series starring Adam West and Burt Ward became a national phenomenon and catapulted superheroes into the limelight, Ben Cooper wisely secured the licenses to the most popular comic book characters in the industry. They even quietly trademarked the word "Super Hero" that same year for only $35.00, which surprisingly neither DC nor Marvel opposed, possibly due to not even noticing it.

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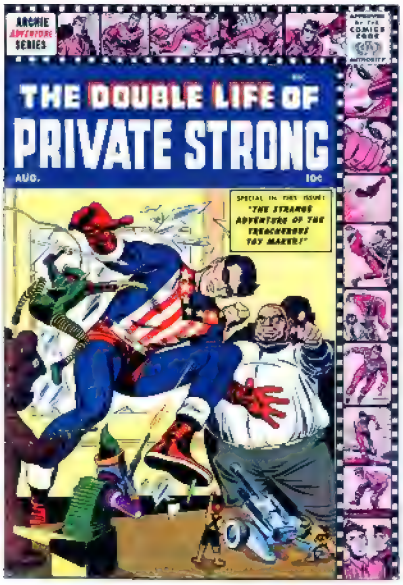


The Shield was back! Well, not the original, for sure...but a retooled version for the Cold War.

The splash of the first story showed the Mark II Shield avoiding the bullets of Communist soldiers while escaping them. Then we segued into the story proper: a couple of KGB types mulled over a secret mission on which they had dispatched one Agent Four, to deal with a capitalist enemy named Fleming. Then the scene switched to America, where two scientists were visiting Professor Malcolm Fleming (for some reason, called Malcolm *Strong* in a caption) at his futuristic, gadget-filled lab. It looked like something out of Reed Richards's wizard's-den in the mid-Sixties *Fantastic Four* and, truthfully, Kirby's art was better here than in his early FF ventures. The visitors wanted to know the contents of Fleming's "Secret Room," and they would, along with us.

First, though, Fleming explained that *"It is known that man uses only one-tenth of his brain power—the other nine tenths are—unexplored territory!"* Said theory holds a lot less water these days, but not back then. Speculating on what power humans might have if they harnessed the remaining nine-tenths, Fleming pushed a button on the wall, and it rose up, revealing a toddler in a glass room. The boy had a big helmet on his head with a couple of lights on the back, and he was happily playing with blocks and a pop-up doll, books strewn on the floor and the bed looking like it was recently slept-in. A proto-Baby Einstein.

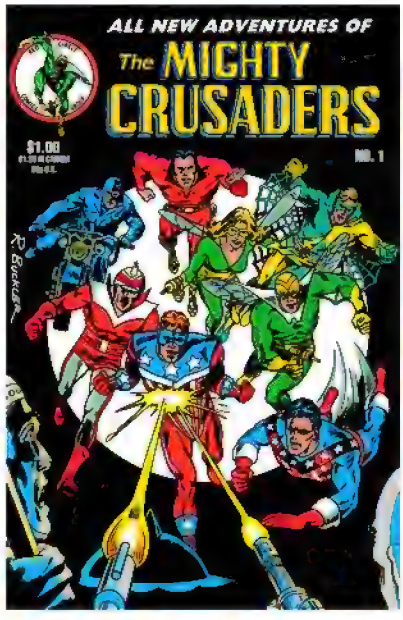
"Using my boy, Roger, as an experimental subject has not harmed him in the least. He lives a germ-free existence and receives micro-electrical stimuli through that helmet—which has been developing his hidden powers since infancy!" This was Fleming's claim, but the two scientists didn't buy it. They were going to report him to the authorities, and made no bones about it. To avoid being separated from his child, Malcolm Fleming took off with him in a futuristic truck before they could return.

But Agent Four, who looked like a Vincent Price knock-off and sported gloves, an opera cape, and a cane, was on the job. He directed two gangster-like Communists to overtake Fleming's truck. As luck would have it, they ran Fleming off the road and his truck plummeted to its doom off the side of a mountain. Figuring the scientist was dead and his notes unrecoverable, the spies left.

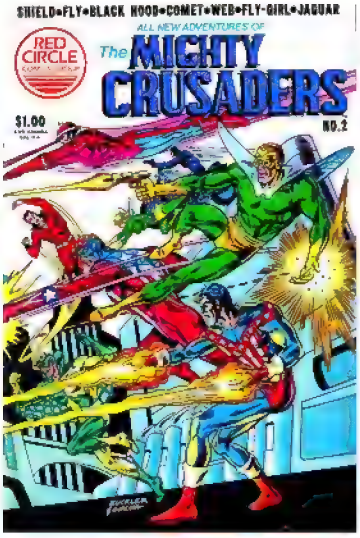
They hadn't counted on Roger. Still wearing his helmet, Roger Fleming crawled from the wreckage, calling for his daddy. He wandered off, lost in that proverbial world he never made, and soon fell into the hands of a farmer named Abel Strong and his wife, Martha. The two adopted the boy and named him Lancelot. As for the helmet, they didn't know what to make of it. That ended the first part of the story.

This was, thematically at least, edging too close to Superman territory for comfort. Prof. Fleming could be seen as a stand-in for Jor-El, Roger for his son Kal, and Abel and Martha as substitutes for Jonathan and Martha Kent. It's doubtful Jack and Joe had any such thing in mind when they created the character. But DC could suggest it was. Before long, they did.

Anyway, the second story showed Lance Strong in full Shield regalia on the splash, headed for a megacephalic stone-being who was burning things with its heat-vision. "Spawn of the X-World" was the title, and it started more than a few years after the earlier one ended. In the opening sequence, something hit a newly-orbiting Sputnik, knocking it off course. The satellite and its rider crash-landed in Fairfield County, U.S.A., precisely where Lance Strong was living, but in a logging area. The being who rode in with it stayed in the "nest" of twisted metal for days and began to grow—and *grow*—



Days later, a logging camp was menaced by a huge grey monster whose eyes shot fire-bolts and started a forest fire. Cut to: Lancelot Strong and his pal Spud, exploring the wreckage of Fleming's truck. Lance ducked into the debris for a while, long enough to make his friend call out anxiously for him.



"What are you doing there? Are you all right?"

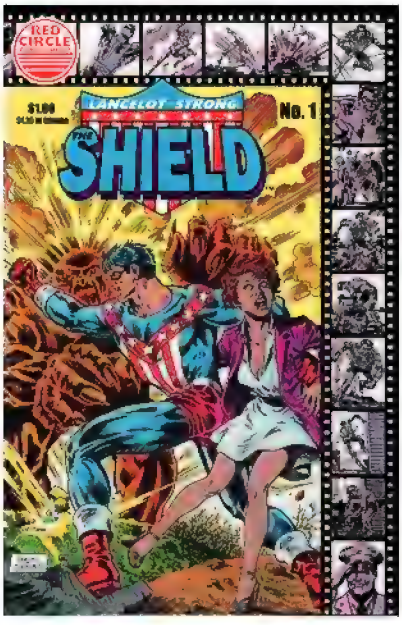
Lance showed his head, shoulders, and hands. He was in the red, white, and blue costume for the first time, and he was smiling. "Never felt better, Spud!"

The costumed youth admitted that he couldn't help putting on the outfit once he saw it, and a book he had retrieved said it was made for someone with special powers who would protect all mankind. Putting on the eye-mask, Lance said it felt like it belonged to him, and he was going to keep it.

But the flames of the forest fire drew their attention, and Lance catapulted in that direction with a leap beyond the ken of normal humanity. The work crew was trying and failing to hold off the alien creature. This, obviously, was a job for a super-hero, and Lancelot Strong filled the bill.

Acting on "*Some inexplicable instinct*," Lance blasted the being with bolts from his hands. It seared the air around the creature but failed to stop him. In return, the alien reversed his eye-blasts to hit the humans with cold waves and turned Lance into a living snowman.

Seemingly unstoppable, the monster from space melted a police motorcycle with his hand, and the cops feared disaster should he reach a city. But Lancelot's internal thermostat turned up his body heat and he melted free from the ice trap. All of this, mind you, just minutes after he donned the costume for the first time.



In a showdown, Lance exhibited Flash-like speed, running around the alien fast enough to create a vortex. A crack of thunder was heard, and Lance, recovering, handed off the miniaturized, hand-sized creature to the police chief. When Lance had created a vacuum, the monster returned to its original tiny size, and the cop opined it was dead.

Then Lance ran off, as all good superheroes must, and in his wake, someone asked his name. "Shield will do!" he replied. "Just call me the Shield!"

It was a rousing origin, but there was a price to be paid. In the last two panels, changed back to his civilian identity, Lance saw Spud being loaded into an ambulance. Another policeman said that he had been caught in the forest fire, and he was a goner. Sadly, Lance dedicated himself to learning the Shield's powers and using them to benefit all mankind.

After a two-page short that introduced the Fly, Simon and Kirby offered "Mystery of the Vanished Wreckage!" We learned it had been fifteen years since the death of Prof. Fleming, and Lancelot Strong was inevitably drawn back to the wreckage site. Unfortunately, so were Agent Four and his minions, who rifled the remains of the van and found Fleming's notes. They prepared to hand it off to their Commie masters by way of an approaching submarine.

Lance, however, used what amounted to super-memory to recall his childhood, and saw the image of his father showing him the Shield costume. "When you are old enough to wear this, you'll be wise enough to use your powers as a shield against the evil forces that threaten mankind!" Lance mused, "Now that I know who I am, I'll be what you hoped for—a *Shield* against evil!"

After finding out someone had ransacked the wrecked truck, the Shield got on the job, intercepted Agent Four and the Communist sub crew as they were about to take off, and piled into them in full-tilt action as only Jack Kirby could draw it. The briefcase containing his father's notes was knocked into the water. The Shield, dodging cannon shells and bullets, plunged into the sea, retrieved it, surfaced to face a machine-gun barrage and then, unbelievably—well, let Kirby tell it:

"A lightning molecular rearrangement renders his body harder than steel—and like a flashing torpedo—he rams the submarine!"

The Shield then ran off with the briefcase, leaving the Russians to be picked up by the police. But when he got back home, Lance found something more than dinner waiting for him. The Strongs handed him a piece of mail from Uncle Sam: his draft notice.

The next story showed us Lance Strong in an Army helmet and uniform, part of a platoon in training at Fort Patton. (Significantly, Jack had served in World War II under General Patton.) His trainer, one Sgt. Griper, showed off the Atomic Tank that he said they'd soon be driving. Then the tank took off on its own, and Lance jumped aboard it, managing to halt the thing just before it would have run into a Colonel and his pretty daughter, Georgia. It turned out the tank was being driven by a horde of little green men under the direction of

another fun-loving Commie spy, Dr. Diablo, who proceeded to shrink Lance, the Colonel, Georgia, and the tank down to toy-size and stuff them in a box. (This was some two years before Henry Pym used the same kind of thing in *Tales to Astonish*.)

As one might expect, Lance changed into his Shield persona, battled through the horde of little green men, and fought his way past a huge-by-comparison chameleon and wolf. Diablo had restored the Colonel and Georgia to their normal size and was intent on his macro-sized micro-men stuffing them into a capsule and shrinking them into a micro-universe. The Shield, finding a gun that dwarfed him, fired at the savant's machine, destroying it. He fought Diablo as a mite for a couple of panels before regaining his regular size, but the villain escaped by releasing a horde of lab animals that got in the Shield's way. Our hero changed back into his Army duds, got the Colonel and Georgia and himself into the newly-expanded atomic tank, and got them the blazes out of there. From his clumsy driving, Georgia deduced that Lance was a nitwit, not like that handsome Shield. Lance smiled.

But that, too, could be seen as veering too close to Superman / Lois Lane / Clark Kent territory.

That was how *Double Life of Private Strong* #1 ended, and it was a rip-roaring ride. If Simon and Kirby could have stayed with it, they might have piloted it to greater heights and at least given Archie a base to build on, as with The Fly. But things didn't turn out that way.

In between his first and second issues, the Shield appeared in a brief two-pager in *Adventures of the Fly* #1 (August 1959), in which the Fly himself came to Camp Sherman in search of the fledgling hero. The Fly wanted him to know that a spy was on the premises, after a secret missile trigger. Behind the insect warrior's back, Lance Strong changed into the Shield, knocked the spy head-first through a wall, and then returned to civilian guise. The Fly finally caught up to Lance and handed him a picture of the Shield. "What has he done?" asked Lance.

"Nothing yet, Private Strong," said the Fly, "but he's up against a tough character—and I don't want him to get into trouble in my magazine!" It was a neat bit of cross-promotion.

Private Strong #2 (August 1959) offered us "Lovable Lou, the Toy Master", who looked somewhat like Sidney Greenstreet and was, of course, secretly in the pay of the Commies. Kirby looked to have laid this one out and fully penciled the splash. After taking Lovable Lou down, the Shield went into a story illustrated by George Tuska, introducing a bumbling Army pal named Pee Wee and a flying tank the Ruskies wanted to steal. Tuska continued on into the next story, which concerned a tailor who dreamed about being the Shield, made a similar costume for himself, and had to be rescued from a pair of crooks by the real deal. It was whimsical and fun, but hardly as high-powered as the preceding issue.

The superhero soldier starred next in a one-page text story in which one General Smith revealed to Lance that he knew he was the Shield. After a Fly two-pager, the Shield was back in a story more firmly drawn by Kirby. "The Ultra-Sonic Spies" saw Lance change to the Shield to save a couple of Army pilots shoved by spies out of an experimental plane. He then flew after the plane, forced the spies to turn back towards America by threatening them with a phony hydrogen bomb, and, as Lance Strong, got a regular chewing-out from the new supporting character, Sgt. Hardrock.

And with that, DC Comics dropped their own bomb on Archie.

Reportedly, they claimed *Private Strong* was too close to Superman in execution. This was only a few years after they had forced Fawcett to stop publishing Captain Marvel. Beleaguered, and with not much to lose, Archie dropped *The Double Life of Private Strong*. On the superhero front, they still had *The Fly*. And of course, they had Archie himself.

The Shield, however, decided to hang around a little longer.

In *Adventures of the Fly* #8 (September 1960), he teamed up with the Fly to take down the Monster Gang, a bunch of thieves dressed as rejects from a Universal horror pic. Our heroes took their lumps until they figured out they were fighting a team of robots, short-circuited them all, and brought the real gang to justice. The art and writing were serviceable, but not spectacular. The Shield ended the story by saying, "I look forward to our next adventure together!" That was sensible, as it was the only outlet he had.

The Shield returned in the next issue (#9, November 1960) to help the Fly battle "The Wizard of Nightmares". Lance Strong revealed that he and the Fly had told each other of their respective secret identities so they could help each other in emergencies. There was a fine two-page spread in the story, but the tale was pretty generic, and the Shield seemed to bumble a bit.

And, like it or not, that was it for Lancelot Strong for a good long while. When a new Shield appeared in *Fly Man* #31 (May 1965), he was the son of Joe Higgins, the original Shield. Fly-Man, né the Fly, didn't ask about the Shield he had known, and it may have been just as well.

Of course, in the world of comic books, hardly any hero with or without potential stays unrevived. The Lancelot Strong Shield finally returned in *Mighty Crusaders* V2 #1 (March 1983), in a story written and drawn by Rich Buckler. He leaped into action on page 2, beat the heck out of a pack of bad guys, and quickly re-met the Fly, who had Fly Girl and the Jaguar in tow. The Web, the Black Hood, and the Comet also turned up, and the old Shield and new Shield soon got into a rivalry. In between, they fought the Brain Emperor and Eterno the Tyrant. Buckler adapted an origin page from *Private Strong* #1 in the back for him.

The Lance Strong Shield appeared in *Mighty Crusaders* V2 #1-4, 6-8, and 10 (May 1983 – December 1984) as a valuable member of the team. He also got his own revival comic, *Lancelot Strong, the Shield* (#1, June 1983) with a movie-strip cover that echoed the first *Double Life* cover. But even though Archie was giving all of the Mighty Crusaders their own solo comics, including the first Shield, it was probably thought that two Shields were a bit confusing. Anyway, Stan Timmons and Rich Buckler wrote the first issue, Alan Weiss and Sam Delarosa drew it, and our hero was back in the Army again, this time at Fort Sherman. General Smith was back, his daughter Laureen was introduced, and Lance Strong was back fighting Communist spies in his red-white-and-blues again. He saved Laureen from a baddie named Negatron, and that finished issue #1.

The Shield #2 (August 1983) shoehorned Steel Sterling into the book, as written by Bob Kanigher and drawn by Rudy Nebres. He got the lead spot, and Lancelot Strong was shunted into the back. In that story, the Shield found his powers were running wild, and he feared harming others if they kept increasing. This time he fought a Japanese villain, the Soulless Samurai, in a battle that extended into the next issue.

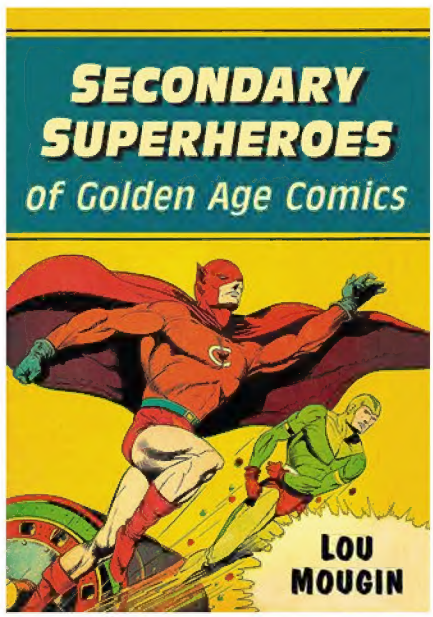
The third issue was titled *Shield-Steel Sterling* (December 1983), coming some four months after the last one. Bob Kanigher wrote it and Alex Nino drew it. Therein, the Shield took on both the Soulless Samurai and Negatron but had to be operated on for appendicitis in between. Steel Sterling came to visit him, then had to get back on the villain-crushing job. Knowing he was in danger of death if he went back into action so soon post-operation, Lancelot Strong nevertheless put on the uniform again.

For the last time.

In an intra-villain battle, Negatron destroyed the Samurai, and the Shield grappled with Negatron in a great underground battle within the San Andreas Fault. It resulted in a huge explosion that raised up a volcanic island. Steel Sterling, looking on, shed a single tear. "I'll keep the faith...till you come back...Shield!"

And as far as we know, he's still keeping the faith.

Lou Mougin has written a big comics history book, Secondary Superheroes of Golden Age Comics, recently published by McFarland, which covers all MLJ's 1940s heroes and a whole lot more. He also writes comics and prose for Warrant, Lucky, In-Dellible, ProSe, Airship 21, AC Comics, and whoever else will let him.



The Butler Brigade vs. the Mighty Crusaders

by Rik Offenberger

Steven and I worked at Archie Comics together. I first worked with Steve on the Archie New Look launch. It was the first time Archie was drawn out of the Bob Montana or Dan DeCarlo style. It was a big deal at the time and got Archie a lot of coverage. There were TV interviews, newspaper articles, magazines, and the Internet. Ever since then, we have remained friends. He had been a huge supporter of the MLJ heroes.

Shield G Man Club: When did you start reading comics?

Steven Butler: I've been reading as far back as I can remember—I think it was around 1971 or '72, with Kamandi, The Last Boy On Earth, and The Demon, by Jack Kirby. I also remember picking up The Avengers #100 and being "wowed" by it. I really liked the *Justice League of America* early on as well

SGMC: Where did you go to art school?

Steve: Well, it wasn't an art school, but I majored in Art at the University of Southern Mississippi. I got my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1988.

SGMC: When did you break into Comics?

Steve: 1989—got my first job as a freelance penciler working for First Comics on their title "The Badger", with writer Mike Baron. Very shortly after that (as in, one month later), Malibu Graphics published "Cat and Mouse" and "Silverstorm", two comics I had worked on with some friends while attending college.

SGMC: How did you get into Marvel?

Steve: I attended a comic con in Chicago in 1991. I was talking with Erik Larsen (of Savage Dragon fame), and he told me my name had been mentioned several times by Marvel editorial, and that it might be a good idea to introduce myself to them at the show. I met with Fabian Nicieza, who invited me to send some samples in.

I worked some pages up after getting home from the convention, mailing them out the next Friday. The following Monday, I got two phone calls from Marvel, from editors who needed some work done. One was an issue of Avengers West Coast, and the other was a backup story in an X-Force annual. They liked the work I did, so I was off to the races.

SGMC: Why did you leave Marvel for Archie Comics?

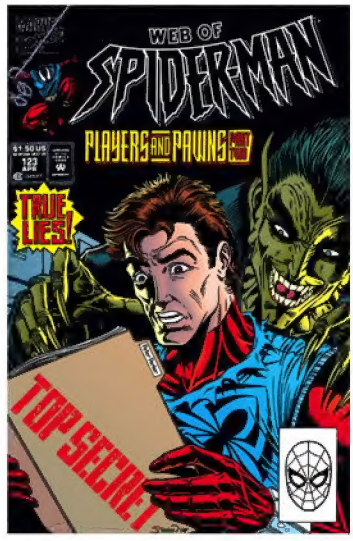
Steve: Marvel went through some tough times financially in the mid-'90s, leading to bankruptcy. All the editors I had ever worked for were either fired or left the company, so there was no more work to be had there for me. I did a short stint at Acclaim/Valiant until they, too, closed up shop. I was working for a coloring book company when I got a call from Pam Eklund, my inker on the Silver Sable comic at Marvel from several years prior. She was inking the Sonic title at Archie Comics at the time and said there might be an opening for me to do some fill-in work there. I contacted them—editor Justin Gabrie—and he asked me to do some Sonic pin-ups for the comic. I turned those in and got a backup story out of it. After I turned in the backup story, I was offered the regular penciling job on the comic, which I then immediately started on for a long run

SGMC: How long were you on Sonic?

Steve: From 1998 until 2015. There were some periods of time when I was off the book doing other projects, but I had two separate extended runs on the series. I loved it. It gave me the opportunity to draw in a different style, while still maintaining the superheroic aspect in the storytelling that I loved to do.

SGMC: How did you get involved with the Archie new look?

Steve: I remember my Sonic editor Mike Pellerito asking me one day if I thought I could draw a romance comic. I thought he was ribbing me or something, but I said, "Sure!" A couple of weeks after that, I got a call from Victor Gorelick (I believe he was the managing editor of the Archie line then), asking me if I'd be interested in drawing a more realistic looking story featuring Betty and Veronica. I then realized that was what Mike P. was referring to when he had asked me about the romance comics thing earlier. I heartily accepted. I believe we were still just starting to recover from Hurricane Katrina around that time, and a regular gig for 4–5 months would

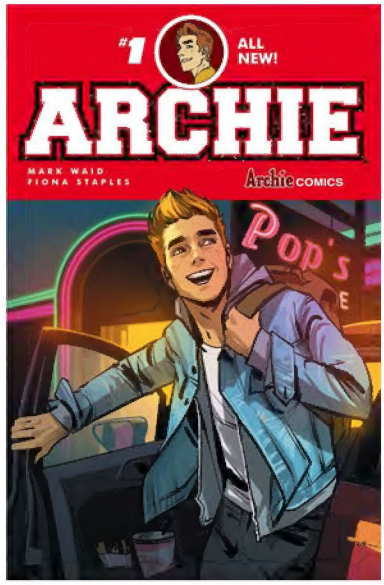


be a welcome thing. I remember there was a slight page rate increase for that job as well, so that might have had something to do with me readily accepting the job as well. Ha!

SGMC: Would you say that was the forerunner for what they're doing now with a more standard comic look for Archie and the gang?

Steve: Oh, I have no doubt at all that it was. They were promoting it at the time as "the new look", and I remember it causing a pretty big uproar on the Internet mostly from fans who were upset that Archie was going to do a line-wide replacement of the classic Dan DeCarlo style in favor of this "new look" style. But, it was just an experiment back then a "testing of the waters", as it were. Several other "new look" stories came out after that initial four-issue run I worked on, but the standard DeCarlo style still held out until fairly recently. I think Archie's current style and tone really got under-way in earnest when the "Afterlife with Archie" title came out, which paved the way for more titles like it to appear, then the whole "Riverdale" CW phenomenon happened, and Archie just kept adapting to that new paradigm. But yes, I think the "New Look" project got the ball rolling to where they are now.

SGMC: When did you discover the Archie superheroes?



Steve: I think it was in one of those "Madhouse Digest" comics that came out in the 1970s. I seem to remember a two-page gag spread, drawn in that same DeCarlo style, but with a bunch of superhero characters I would later find out were the Mighty Crusaders, and had this really rich history in comicdom of course, when the Red Circle line came out in the early '80s. I was definitely on board then!!

SGMC: Which of the Mighty Crusaders is your favorite?

Steve: That's kind of tough because I like them all, but if I had to narrow it down to one, I'd have to pick the original Joe Higgins version of The Shield. Comet and Hangman are close contenders, though!!

SGMC: When did Archie come to you to do a Who's Who handbook?

Steve: That was Mike Pellerito again. It was not long after I had finished the Betty and Veronica stuff. It must have been around 2007. I

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